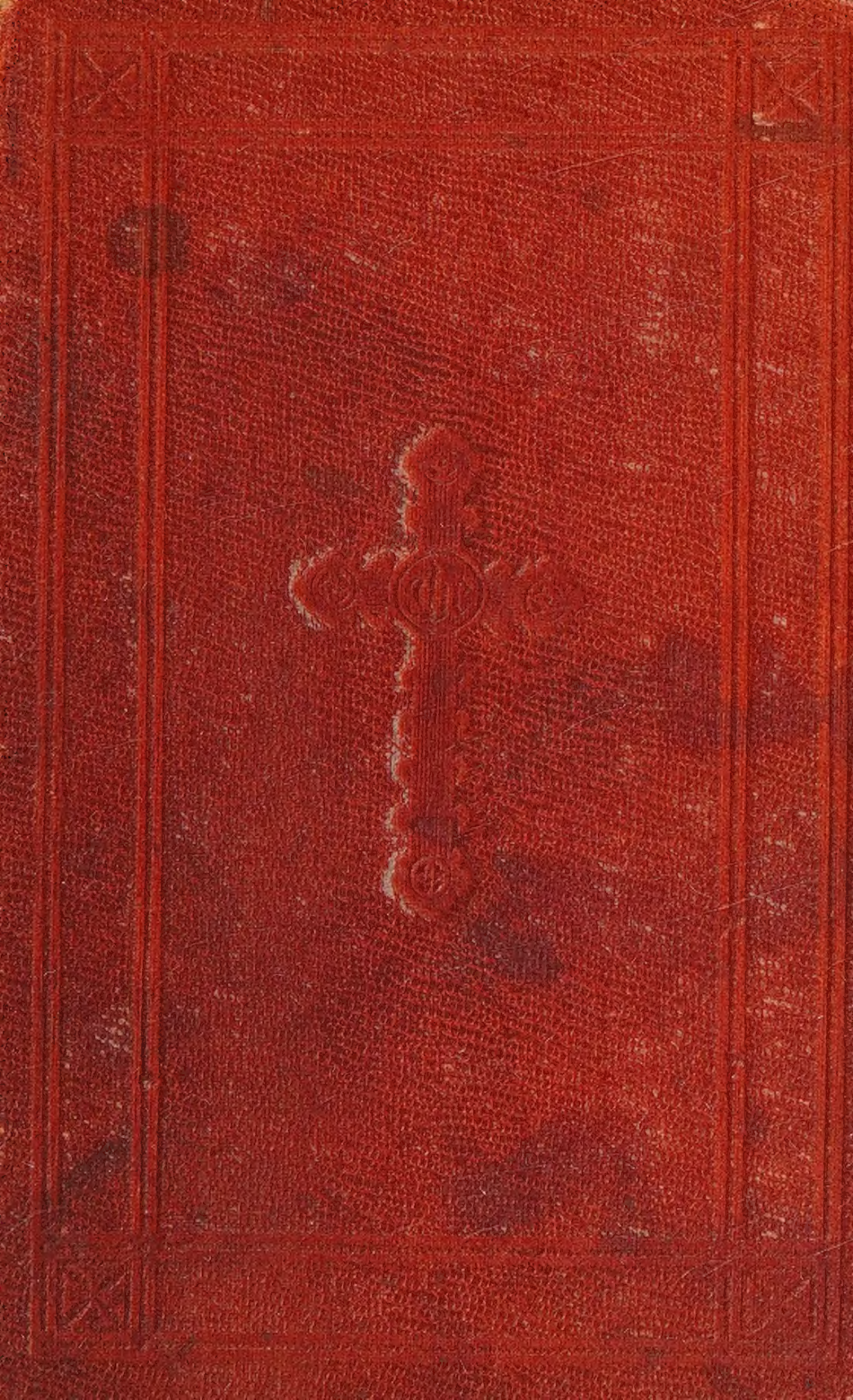

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CONSIDERATIONS ON ETERNITY.

In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin. *Ecclesiasticus. ch.VII.40*

The hills of the world were bowed down by the journeys of his Eternity. *Habac. ch.III.*

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NINE CONSIDERATIONS

ON

ETERNITY.

BY JEROME DREXELIUS, S. J.

FROM THE LATIN OF THE BAVARIAN EDITION, 1629.

BY

FATHER ROBERT,

MOUNT ST. BERNARD, LEICESTERSHIRE.

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DEDICATION.

TO THE RIGHT REV. DR. JAMES BROWN,
BISHOP OF SHREWSBURY.

My dear Lord,

I am thankful that I have an opportunity of presenting to your Lordship a testimonial of former affection and esteem,—and I am the more happy that this testimonial, small and insignificant as it may be in itself, is one which will remind us that our separation in time is of little moment, provided we meet together in a holy friendship on the peaceful shores of eternal happiness. That which Bishop Godfredus, in his contemplation of death, said of himself, "I stand every moment at the gate of Eternity," I may, I hope without any presumption or flattery, say of your Lordship; and that your life is not only a meditation upon, but more important still, a preparation for a good death; and this by the simple process of a pure intention, which centres all your thoughts, words, and ac-

tions in God. Hence the profound and learned Considerations on Eternity, which the distinguished Jesuit Father, Drexelius, addressed in Latin to the pious Maximilian, and his wife, Elizabeth, the Duke and Duchess of Bavaria, though more pleasing and more beautiful in the original language, will not be unacceptable to your Lordship in a plain and simple English dress. For these reasons I have placed the translation under your Lordship's patronage. If I have been forward and wanting in respect in so doing, attribute it to the simplicity and ignorance of a monk, who has forgotten the etiquette and polish of the world, and in your charity pardon your Lordship's

Humble and obedient Servant,

BROTHER ROBERT.

Abbey of Mount St. Bernard,
Feb. 28th, 1856.

TO THE READER.

Death has been beautifully termed by one of the Holy Fathers "The Gate of Eternity." Before this gate we are all of us hourly standing. Any moment it may be opened by the Angel of the Most High for our admittance. Hence the admonition of the Wise man: "Remember thy latter end; forget it not; for there is no returning." Once we have passed beneath the portal of this gate, we cannot retrace our steps. On the right hand is the region of infinite and eternal bliss; on the left the eternal and devouring fire of hell. To which of these regions of Eternity our steps will be directed by the officers of Divine Justice, will depend upon the good or bad state of our souls, at the moment they have reached that country from whose "bourn no traveller returns."

Since, then, the whole of eternal happiness, or the whole of eternal misery, depends upon the single hour of death,

accordingly as it is a good or a bad death, and since a good death is the ordinary sequence of a good life, we should naturally conclude—apart from all experience—that all Christians were labouring with earnestness to secure a happy death, and thereby a happy Eternity. Were they, indeed, to take the part of prudence, and study their eternal welfare, this would be a legitimate conclusion. "Life would be the meditation of Death;" or "Time would be the meditation of Eternity." Alas! how very different is the picture which experience holds up to our view!

Our life is hastening unto death with giant steps, and more swiftly than the eagle hurrying to its prey. Time is but one short day's sail from the shores of Eternity. Once landed upon these shores we cannot look back. We must either ascend to the right directly to the kingdom of Heaven, (or at least to Purgatory, until prepared by purification for this final happiness,) or we must descend to the left into the pool burning with fire and brimstone. Thus after death there is finally a twofold life, or rather a twofold state; the one is properly called life, because it contains the perfection and the fullest enjoyment of life, and

this for ever, without any fear of termination; the other is called the second death, because it is a perpetual dying, under torments the most agonizing, which are always inflicting their pain, yet never kill or annihilate their victim.

It is surely wise, therefore, now, during this short life, to think of that life which will never end. It is surely prudent whilst we are on the way, to reflect sometimes upon the end of our journey It is surely our interest, whilst we have leisure for reflection, to meditate upon the house of our Eternity. This meditation has made many saints, has withdrawn many from the gaieties of the world into the desert or the cloister, to weep, in the bitterness of their sorrow, over their past transgressions. Such meditation is an excellent preservative from sin. To reflect upon the joys of Heaven sweetens and alleviates the labours, the crosses, and afflictions of this probationary life. To revolve in our minds the eternal years of misery to which the reprobate are sentenced by unrelenting Justice, is powerfully calculated to check the ardour of our pursuit after earthly and temporal enjoyments, and to lead us, with fear and

trembling, along the narrow and the rugged path of salvation.

Such were the motives which induced the pious Jesuit Father, Drexelius, to compose these "*Considerations*," and dedicate them to Maximilian and Elizabeth, the Duke and Duchess of Bavaria. "I would not," he says to these royal personages, "have composed this work, unless I had been persuaded that Eternity would be so constantly fixed in your thoughts, that Heaven would be as always present to your sight, that Eternity would be pondered seriously in your minds, and that no other thought, indeed, but Eternity would absorb the attention of your princely souls."

This, dear reader, is the object for which this little work is presented to your perusal in your own language.

Ralph Winterton, Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, translated this Treatise of Drexelius in the year 1632. It was recommended to his notice by a gentleman who had then recently travelled on the continent. Though an excellent translation, it has, however the following serious blemishes. All illustrations, examples, and historical facts relating to monasteries and convents are omitted. Likewise all men-

tion of the Blessed Eucharist, Sacrifice of the Mass, and Confession, or if they are mentioned, it is in a very different sense from the author. Moreover, to prevent by these omissions any abrupt transition, pieces of his own are inserted. Winterton, being a Fellow of the Protestant University of Cambridge, thought it perhaps his duty, before presenting the Jesuit Father to the notice of a Protestant public, to make these elisions. They are, however, in this translation supplied. Winterton's language, now more than two hundred years old, is antiquated, and his translation out of print. These several defects and omissions could be repaired and supplied only by a new translation. And if the translator prove instrumental in circulating this valuable old Catholic ascetical book, he will have obtained the chief object of his wishes and his labours.

We cannot withhold from the Catholic reader the testimony of the Protestant Collegian to the excellency of these Considerations on Eternity. "The more I grew acquainted with Drexelius," he says, in his "Epistle Dedicatory," "the more I liked him. And in his Epistle to the Reader: "And having found so much good

by this book myself, I could not be so envious as not to impart it unto others for a Sovereign Medicine, to procure quiet sleep .....it is a *Medicine* fitting *all ages, complexions, conditions, places, parts, diseases, spiritual and corporal*, whatsoever.....Take it and use it."

Yes, dear reader, may you, like the good bishop Godfredus, "every moment stand at the gate of Eternity," by pious meditation, that when it shall be opened, you may be received into the kingdom of eternal happiness.

Abbey of Mount St. Bernard,
2nd Sunday of Lent, 1856.

N.B.—Much advantage has been derived by the present translator from the ancient translation of Winterton.

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CONSIDERATION I.

WHAT IS ETERNITY?

"The word of God on high is the fountain of wisdom, and her ways are everlasting commandments."—ECCLES. I, 5.

"An infant plays with fate and nature; the fool with Eternity;—but the wise man shall have dominion over the stars."

CONSIDERATIONS ON ETERNITY.

CONSIDERATION I.

WHAT IS ETERNITY?

Simonides being asked by Hiero, King of Sicily, to inform him:—What God is?*—desired a day for consideration before he delivered his answer. At the termination of the first day, he solicited a second; and still unable to solve the question, a third; and then finally declared, that the more he thought on this sublime subject the greater contemplation it demanded; and the more anxious he was in his investigations, the less progress he made, the farther he was from attaining his purpose.

In commencing our meditation, we should ask ourselves: What is Eternity? Boetius† says, "That it is the whole and the perfect possession of a life that will never end. Let

* Cicer, lib. 1, de Nat. Deor.

† Book 5. de Consol. pros. 6.

no one be disappointed, if we candidly confess that it cannot be known; that the more we dive into it, the deeper it becomes, for who can fathom that which is unfathomable? or circumscribe that which has no limits?" If any one still presses for a faint delineation of it, we reply with Plato,* that this may be accomplished more easily by negation than affirmation; "What God is I know not; What He is not, that I know." In like manner St. Augustine† describeth the true blessedness of heaven, by removing from it every kind of evil. "We may more easily," he says, "discover that which is not there, than find out all the ingredients of this bliss. In heaven there is certainly no mourning, nor weeping, nor want, not even deficiency, nor sickness, nor death, nor any evil." So may we speak of Eternity. Whatever is an object of sight, or takes possession of the mind through the outward senses, is not eternal, "For the things which are seen," says St. Paul.‡ "are temporal; but the things which are not seen, are eternal." In a similar manner, each one may say,—this my joy—

* In Timæo,

† Sermo. 64, de verbis Domini.

‡ 2 Corinth. iv. 18.

these my pleasures and delights,—these riches and honours—this magnificent edifice; yea, all that I have with life itself, are perishable, and transitory, and not eternal; so that man can point to nothing which will not fade and have an end. It is, indeed, the ordinary language of common people to say, this structure is imperishable, this monument everlasting. The impatient are accustomed to complain that their pains have no cessation. But short, O very short! is that Eternity which is comprehended within such expressions. Whereas, say what we will of the reality, we say too little; we cannot reach to eternity! Hence St. Augustine,* "Thou sayest whatever thou wilt of Eternity: and for this reason, when thou shalt have said all thou canst, thou wilt have said nothing. It is, however, necessary to say something, that thou mayest learn what thou canst not say." Trismegistus† observes that, "The soul is the horizon of time and eternity; for inasmuch as it is immortal, it is a partaker of Eternity; but inasmuch as it is infused by God into the body, it is a partaker of time. Before we proceed further, let us, as lovers of order, see what men of ancient times, the

* In Psalm 63. † In Asclepio suo.

Romans, the Greeks, the Egyptians, and others have thought of Eternity. They certainly believed in it, and depicted it in a variety of forms.

CHAPTER I.

VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF ETERNITY FROM THE ANCIENTS.

In the first place, Eternity was represented in the ancient world by a ring or circle which has neither beginning nor end; this property belongs alone to the Divine Eternity. As God, therefore, is eternal and His duration properly called Eternity; so the Egyptians represented Him by a circle. The Persians, likewise, thought that they bestowed the greatest honours upon God, when, ascending a high tower, they designated Him "The circle of the heavens." And it was a custom among the Turks every morning, (as Pierius informs us,) to exclaim with a loud voice from a lofty minaret: "God always was and always will be." The Saracens also depicted God by a circle. Mercurius Trismegistus, in my

opinion the most celebrated of the philosophers, and who composed more works than any other writer, if we may believe Seleucus and Menæceus, defined God to be an intellectual sphere, the centre of which is every where, and the circumference no-where; because the Divine Majesty and immensity have no termination. For this reason the ancients built their temples to the Gods round. Numa Pompilius is reported to have consecrated to the goddess Vesta, a temple of this form at Rome. In like manner Augustus Cæsar, in the name ot Agrippa, dedicated a circular temple to all the gods, and inscribed upon it the name of Pantheon. Hence Pythagoras, to express God's eternity, taught his disciples to turn themselves round about, when they worshipped Him. And there was a law established by Numa (according to Brissonius): That they who were about to adore God should turn round in a circle.

God, therefore, according to the ancients, is a circle, but a circle without a periphery or circumference, and the centre of which is everywhere; since God is the beginning and the end of all things. Wherefore holy Job justly exclaims: "Behold God is great

exceeding our knowledge; the number of his years is inestimable."*

In the second place, the ancients have represented God as a sphere and a globe. Faustina the Empress, had money coined with this effigy and superscription; on a globe sat the Empress, stretching forth one hand, and holding in the other a sceptre with this motto: "*Eternity.*" Hence many of the ancients believed the world to be eternal, because it was round. The eloquent Basil refutes this error in the following words: "Let the world," he says, "be considered a circle; but remember that the beginning of a circle is the centre."

In the third place, Eternity was sometimes depicted as a seat, which denoted eternal rest. The major part of the Nasamones, a certain people in Africa, not only expired in a sitting posture, but were anxious to be buried in the same position, to express their attainment of Eternity, and perpetual cessation from labour. Whence to this day, in many places, kings and emperors are found in their subterraneous mausoleums sitting in silent and mournful majesty. It was usual with the Romans to

* Ch. xxxvi. 26.

place the molten statues of their Emperors upon such seats, to denote that they were in the enjoyment of Eternity.

There are persons who will sometimes reason with themselves after this manner: "I, who have been so long oppressed and harassed by care and labour, why do I not take a moment's breathing time? Why do I not make a pause amidst all this bustle? Why do I not make an end of these long and troublesome anxieties? I have toiled sufficiently; let others fatigue themselves as much as I have done. For my part, I will take my rest and enjoy my ease." They then erect pleasant mansions, and retire to enjoy their repose, their holiday from turmoil and care. But oh! how short is the period of this halcyon peace! They sit down to woo sweet rest and calmness, but this neither in its proper place, nor in its proper season, as we learn from the golden book of the Imitation of Christ, in which we meet with this check to our presumption: "Dispose of, and order all things as thou wilt, and as it may seem best to thee; thou wilt still find something to suffer, either willingly or unwillingly; and so thou wilt still find the cross: the whole

life of Christ was a cross, and a martyrdom; and dost thou seek rest and happiness?'* Consequently we must erect the seat of our repose in heaven, and not on earth; for tranquillity cannot exist with the turmoil of our residence here below. If, however, all other things should permit our abiding place to be in peace, yet death will come speedily and overturn it; so that there can be no true rest but that which is eternal. Still, if we may allow true peace and quietness in this life, it must be found in this, the total surrender of ourselves and of all that we have to the will of God, and the withdrawal of our confidence from the foolish things of this world, to place it in His Almighty protection. This is the instruction of the wise man: "Trust in God, and stay in thy place."† Without this calmness of mind all other things are mere troubles, the waves of a tempestuous sea, and the very presence of hell. But let us return to the ancients.

In the fourth place, they have painted Eternity under the figures of the sun and moon. The sun, though it seemeth to die every day, yet always reviveth. It is every day buried, and yet every day cometh forth

* Lib. 2. ch. xii. † Eccles. xi. 22.

from the grave. It daily riseth in the morning, and setteth in the evening. In like manner the moon hath her increase and her wane. Catullus hath composed upon this subject these beautiful verses:*

> The sun doth set, the sun doth rise again;
> The day doth close, the day doth break again.
> Once set our sun, again it riseth never,
> Once clos'd our day of life,—'tis night for ever.

In hell this night is perpetual, and without any sleep. Thus the reprobate sleep not, because they slept here, where they should have watched. There they keep their constant vigils, after loitering in their sins here—we may say, not long, indeed,—but if they could, they would have continued longer, yea for ever. It is far otherwise with the blessed in heaven. The Holy Catholic Church sings of Christ's martyrs: "Let perpetual light and immortality shine upon the saints." There they have rest, there they have pleasure, after their short labours and watchings on earth.

In the fifth place the ancients designated Eternity by the basilisk, the most venomous of all reptiles, and which, says Horus Niliacus, cannot be killed by any human power. It is so virulent that it withers

* In Hendecasyllabus.

up the very herbs with its breath, and puts to flight all other creatures merely by hissing, and silences by its presence the birds in the midst of their song. Ælianus reports, that a certain beast dropped down through weariness, and died in the desert of Africa, and that many serpents gathered together as to a banquet; but that they immediately ran away and hid themselves in the sand, from the presence of the basilisk.

Eternity, whether of happiness or of misery, can neither be made short nor diminished; much less can it be avoided or taken away. Let it not, therefore, seem strange that it should strike with a salutary fear all that are in their right mind, if they will deign to give it but a passing thought. How infinite are the coils of this basilisk! How immeasurable and inexplicable its intricate foldings and its evolutions! Alas! alas! what a frightful dragon! Let us, for a moment, apply these reflections to ourselves.

When a man turns his attention upon himself, looks into his interior, and diligently examines his conscience, it often happens that he finds many serpents' nests, and whole broods of vipers, and thus mar-

velleth to himself, "Whence all this venom in my bosom? Whence all these snakes, all these deadly sins? Whence these lizards, these foul and lustful thoughts? This numerous and pestilent brood of reptiles horrifies me!" But marvel not, their cause will be easily explained. A damp and neglected spot is best adapted for the generation of serpents. Behold, then, a twofold cause,—the dampness and the neglect of the place by those whose duty it is to take care of it. In like manner it is with the soul of man. If we spend all our care upon the body, treating it with great nicety, pampering it with dainties, studying how to provide it with feasts, and enervating and undermining it by pleasure and voluptuousness, we must candidly confess, that its inhabitant, the soul, dwells in a very moist situation. If to this swampy place, we subjoin, the neglect of religious duties, unconcernedness about salvation, total indifference about the soul, provided the body be well, with few and careless confessions, is it wonderful that multitudes of serpents and venomous reptiles should breed in such neglected souls? Oh! good Christian brother, let the thought of Eternity, as a basilisk,

dwell ever in thy mind, and thou wilt soon have the pleasure of seeing these venomous creatures flee away! That they now infest your soul, is an evident sign that you seldom meditate upon Eternity. Reform your conduct, and begin at once to reflect upon this great truth: "*That which delighteth you is momentary; but that which tormenteth is eternal!*"

In the sixth place, Eternity was sometimes represented by the ancients after this manner. There was a vast cave full of horror, around which a serpent wound its body, and when it had completed the circle, took its tail between its teeth. At the right hand of the cave stood a young man, with a beautiful and pleasant countenance, holding in his right hand a bow, with two arrows, and carrying in his left a harp. In the very entrance of the cave sat an old man in an opposite direction, with his eyes intently fixed upon his writing tablet, and whatever the motions of the celestial globe, or the young man dictated to him he wrote. At the left hand of the cave sat a grave and grey-headed matron, with her eyes always in motion. At the entrance of the cave were four staircases, ascending one above another. The first

was made of iron; the second of brass; the third of silver; and the fourth of gold. On these stairs little children were ascending and descending, and playing without any fear of falling. Such was the picture. Let us now decipher its meaning. The cave signified the incomprehensibility of Eternity. The serpent that coiled about it, time. The young man, the Almighty who holds in His hand heaven, earth, and hell. Earth and hell are transfixed by the arrows of the Lord; but in heaven there is nothing but joy and the melody of the harp. The old man was fate, or that which God had decreed from eternity. The grey-headed matron was nature; the stairs, distinct times and ages; the children running up and down the stairs, men sporting with the business of salvation, and playing the jester in the very entrance of Eternity. Alas! O mortal men! we have played too long amidst these dangers! We are very near Eternity, yea, upon its very brink, whilst we seem to be in the midst of life! The slightest breath of death is sufficient to plunge us into Eternity! Death need not use any great power, or combat long against us; we are laid prostrate in a moment, and hurled down these

stairs into the ocean that has no shore! Think seriously, you who are sporting upon these slippery steps, and who turn your thoughts to anything and to everything, rather than to this momentous subject; think seriously, I repeat, that it may be to-day or to-morrow, you will be translated from time into Eternity!

CHAPTER II.

THE HIDDEN MEANING OF HOLY SCRIPTURE UNFOLDED.

After the types and figures of Eternity which we have just been considering, we may now very appropriately and advantageously direct our attention to the divine truth of the Inspired Writings. When Nabuchodonosor, King of Babylon, cast three Hebrew children into the fiery furnace, for disobedience to his commands, the flames ascended nine-and-forty cubits above the top of the furnace. An event certainly both very wonderful and mysterious. For could any one measure so accurately the height of the rapacious flames? Could any one fly upwards and

apply a rule to the summit of the blazing fire, and then inform us that it was just nine-and-forty cubits, neither more nor less? Why not fifty? For we are accustomed to number by tens,—as twenty, thirty, forty, fifty,—though in reality there may be more or fewer contained under this number. But in this text of Scripture we have just one less than fifty, under which number there is undoubtedly concealed some hidden meaning and mystery.

The number fifty, in the ancient dispensation, signified the year of jubilee. But the flames in the Babylon of hell, though they rage exceedingly beyond our utmost conception, both against soul and body, and infinitely surpass the most excruciating torments of this world, yet never extend so far, or reach so high as the jubilee year—the year of joy and freedom. In hell there is no jubilee, nor pardon, no cessation to, or end of, torments! No, the present time, and not every hundred years, or every fifty years, but the present time, the present day, the present hour,—yea, the present moment, is our year of jubilee! Now we may obtain that pardon which hereafter we cannot obtain through-

out Eternity! At present, the short span of a day may discharge us of more debts, than the fires of hell can do for endless ages!

Let us proceed in an explanation of Holy Scripture. Whilst the people of God were passing over the Jordan, "the waters that came down from above stood in one place, ...but those that were beneath, ran down into the sea of the wilderness, (which now is called the Dead Sea,) until they wholly failed."* In Ecclesiasticus, it is said: "There is one that buyeth much for a small price."† Now these two passages of Holy Writ, Galfridus‡ joineth together, and draweth from them this profitable instruction: "If eternal bitterness be thy just due, and thou mayest avoid it by enduring temporal sorrow, surely it is in thy power to purchase much for a small price. I admit that it is a sea on which thou art sailing—but a dead sea. What gratitude, then, dost thou not owe to God, who, when thou hast deserved to be overwhelmed by a boisterous, briny, and unnavigable ocean, hath in His great mercy launched thy vessel upon placid waters, that

* Jos. iii. 16. † Ch. xx. 12.

‡ Clarovallens in Cant.

by this happy change thou mayest voyage through the dead sea to the land of the living?"

This writer compares the adversities of the present life to the Dead Sea, and eternal punishment to a salt and unnavigable ocean. No one can escape both; all must steer their course either upon the one or the other. "What art thou doing?" exclaims St. Chrysostom; "art thou preparing to fly up to heaven without calculating the difficulties which will thwart thy ascent?" Contrive as we please, we must necessarily pass through the Dead Sea. It is, however, in our power, if we wish, to anchor safely in the peaceful haven of eternal rest. "The Word of God on high is the fountain of wisdom, and her ways are everlasting commandments."* Through this dead sea there is no other way to the land of the living, but the way of God's commandments. This is the distinct declaration of Holy Scripture: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."† Through these territories the road lies open to eternity.

If we ask an eminent commentator of Holy Scripture (Cornelius a Lapide):

* Eccles. i. 5. † Matt. xix. 17.

"What is Eternity?" He replies, "A circle perpetually revolving round itself, the centre of which is *always*, and the circumference *never*," that is, never terminated. What is Eternity? It is an orb every way round and perfectly similar, without beginning and without end. What is Eternity?

> A wheel that turneth, and hath turned ever:
> A wheel that turneth, and will turn for ever.

What is Eternity? It is a year always decaying and always reviving—always revolving and always returning to the same point. What is Eternity? A perennial fountain, the streams of which, after many meanderings, flow back to their source, that they may flow for ever! What is Eternity? An ever-living spring from which gush up unceasingly, either the sweet waters of benediction, or the bitter waters of cursing. What is Eternity? It is a labyrinth with its interminable windings, which lead those who enter it round and round, without the possibility of escaping from its mazes. What is Eternity? It is a whirlpool, the eddies and gyrations of which are without limitation. What is Eternity? A serpent coiled with its tail within its mouth, which begins its coil

again and never finishes. What is Eternity? It is duration always present—one perpetual present, which never transpires and becomes past or future. What is Eternity? "It is the age of ages," says Dionysius;* which never passes away, but remains always what it is. What is Eternity? It is a beginning without a beginning, a middle, or an end. It is a commencement always continuing, interminable, and always being renewed: in which the blessed are always commencing a happy life, and are always abounding with new pleasures; in which the reprobate are always dying, and after their death, and their struggle with death, begin again to die, and combat afresh with their enemy, death. As long as God shall be God, so long will the saints be happy, so long will they reign and triumph with Him; and so long, too, will the sons of perdition writhe in hell, and cry out, "We are tormented in this flame;" and we are still to be crucified and tormented for ever!

* Cap. 10 de divin nomin

CHAPTER III.

WHY IS THE REGION OF ETERNITY CALLED A MANSION?

John, patriarch of Alexandria, a very pious prelate, was wont to visit the sick, and to take with him one Troilus, a bishop who felt far more interest in his money than in the infirm members of his flock. The patriarch, one day, whispered in his ear, "Brother, let us assist the friends of Jesus Christ." The wily Troilus, anxious to conceal his covetous disposition, commanded all the silver, which he had brought with him for other purposes, to be distributed by his servants to the poor. Not long afterwards he was seized with fever brought on by his avarice. The patriarch being informed of his indisposition, and readily conjecturing the cause, went to visit him, carrying with him as much money as Troilus had lately dispersed amongst the indigent. After a few words of introduction, he said to Troilus: "I was but joking the other day, when I asked you to relieve the wants of the sick, because my own servant had no money with him. I

now return you, with many thanks, the golden pieces you then parted with to the needy." When Troilus beheld the coin on the table before him, his fever immediately abated; and he found himself so much better in every respect, that he got up, dressed himself, and went to dinner. Just after noon, when he had finished his dinner, he went to sleep, and fell into a pleasant dream. He saw a very stately edifice, on the front of which, above the entrance, there was this inscription: "*The eternal mansion and resting-place of Bishop Troilus.*" He was very much delighted with his dream. But immediately after he beheld another which changed his joy into sorrow. For there came a builder with a great many workmen, and he said to them: "Take down that inscription, and put this one in its place: *The eternal mansion and resting-place of John, Archbishop of Alexandria, which he has bought for thirty pieces of money.*" Upon this Troilus was greatly alarmed; and revolving in his mind the purport of the vision, immediately turned it to his own eternal welfare. For from a hard and covetous person, he became liberal and charitable to the poor. Such was the

happy result of this vision of the eternal mansion.

O happy mansion! thrice happy, because you are eternal! how much does Christ desire that we should love you, that we should hasten to you, and despise these earthly tabernacles, these ruinous houses of flesh! "In the house of my Father," He says, "there are many mansions." No one is denied admittance but by his own waywardness. No one is excluded; for the residence is very large and commodious. Even time shuts the door upon no one; for there is a mansion, and this mansion is everlasting.

PRAYER.

O Eternal and Merciful God! O Eternal Truth! O True Charity and Beloved Eternity! so remove from us our blindness, that through these present and momentary afflictions, we may deserve to escape the future, most fearful and eternal punishments. Teach and direct us so to possess the goods of this life, as not to lose those which are eternal; so to bewail our transgressions, as to escape everlasting torments; so to behave ourselves in this house of our banishment, as not to be shut

out from the eternal mansions; so to advance on our journey through life, as not to be rejected from our true country in heaven.

CONSIDERATION II.

IN WHAT THINGS DOES NATURE REPRESENT ETERNITY?

"The hills of the world are bowed down by the journeys of his Eternity."—Habacuc, iii. 6.

"The basilisk, the Salamander, the golden ring, the burning mountain, may, here on earth, put us in mind of Eternity; but a blessed Eternity can alone make us eternally happy in Heaven."

CONSIDERATION II.

IN WHAT THINGS DOES NATURE REPRESENT ETERNITY?

Heathens, then, as we have just seen, admitted an Eternity of some kind or other, and described it by certain signs. For God made it known to them; "so that they are inexcusable."* How much more acceptable ought the consideration of Eternity to be to Christians, to whom it is so much more accurately represented? "Wherefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whoever thou art,"† that, being often put in mind of Eternity, permits it entirely to escape thy memory. Thou hast often before thee, yea, under thy very eyes, rings, and circles, and spheres, and globes—the sun, likewise, and the moon. Now, any one of these things will bring to thy recollection Eternity. Nature, like a kind mother, hath exposed them to public view, that when we either see them or hear of them, we may be invited to meditate on this momentous subject.

* Rom. i. 20. † Rom. ii. 1.

Solinus informs us, that there is in Arcadia a certain kind of stone, called Asbestos, which, when set on fire, burns on continually. Wherefore in times past lamps were made of it for temples and sepulchres. St. Augustine mentions this stone in his City of God.* Pliny, Volaterranus, Dioscorides, and many others tell strange stories about a certain kind of flax or linen, which they designate by various names; some *Linum Asbestinum;* others, *Carystium;* others, *Indicum;* and others, *Linum Vivum.* And this linen is not only not consumed by fire, but is easily washed and cleansed. Hence the bodies of kings, in former times, when they were to be burnt, were usually wrapped in shrouds of this linen, to preserve their ashes from being scattered and mingled with those of other bodies. Of this linen, Nero had a towel which he esteemed above gold and precious stones. Behold how nature, like a faithful guide and governess, pointeth out that which fire hath not power to consume. In like manner shall the reprobate burn, but never to ashes. They shall burn perpetually, but never be consumed. They shall implore the flames to devour them, but never ob-

* Lib. 21. ch. 5.

tain the desired death. How justly, therefore does Amandus* exclaim: "O eternal woe which will have no termination! O end without end! O death more grievous that any other kind of death! always to be dying, yet never dead!" We find a similar expression in the Prophet Isaiah: "Their fire shall not be quenched."† And the angel in the Apocalypse: "They shall seek death, and shall not find it."‡

That the Salamander could live in flames of fire for a short time, we have the testimony not only of Aristotle, Pliny, Galen, Ælian, Dioscorides, but also of St. Augustine. This animal is of a very cold nature, and derives its existence from showers of rain. It dies beneath the sunbeam, or in dry weather. Hence, according to Pliny, it becomes in the flames hard and conjealed like ice. Lights for the perpetual lamp are made of its skin. God, who has moulded the Salamander from moistened clay, hath likewise formed man of the same material, but of a far more excellent nature. "He hath made him a little less than the angels,"§ and hath bestowed upon him, after the trials of this life, a right to the

* Horolog. Sapientiæ.

† Ch. lxvi. 24. ‡ Ch. ix. 6. § Psalm viii. 5.

same kingdom with the angels. But "man when he was in honour did not understand; he hath been compared to senseless beasts, and made like to them."* By his own malice he hath made himself a Salamander that must either always live, or always die amidst everlasting flames. In the fiery dungeon of hell all things are eternal; but more especially the six following.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT THINGS ARE ETERNAL IN HELL.

I. The damned themselves, who can never die. They can neither destroy themselves nor their companions. "They shall seek death, and shall not find it."† Yea, the desire itself of dying, which they know well can never be granted, will be to them a most intolerable torment

II. The prison is also eternal. It will never become dilapidated, never fall to ruins; it can never be dug through, so as to afford egress to the prisoners. It is fortified and walled in by steep rocks and lofty

* Psalm xlviii. 21. † Apoc. ix. 6.

mountains. The bars and bolts of its gates are so strong, that no one can escape from its enclosure. If any of the reprobate were allowed by God to leave his dungeon, and visit this world again before the day of judgment, still he would not be released from his torments, but would carry his hell about with him. We will here relate the dispute, certainly not a vain one, between two theologians, about the situation and the place of bodies in hell. One of them, named Geometer, and no bad scholar, commenced his speech somewhat in the following manner: "It is certain from the lips of Christ Himself, that the greater part of mankind are lost, so that the number of the saints in comparison with the reprobate, will be few. These are the words of Truth itself: 'Enter ye in at the narrow gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are that go in thereat. How narrow is the gate, and strait the way that leadeth to life, and few there are that find it.'* I ask, is this solemn warning listened to by the world? Are these words respected as the words of Christ? But let us proceed to the lesson which they contain. Now the

* Matt. vii. 13

prison of hell is in the middle and centre of the earth; and how can these millions of bodies, (for we are able to measure its boundaries), be confined therein, unless we say that body is penetrated by body?" "This is not necessary," replied the other. "They may be as pickles in the brine-vat, so closely squeezed and compressed together, that nothing will remain between them but the salt. In a similar manner will the damned be salted with fire. Or they may be as bricks in a brick-kiln, all packed close to one another, and all penetrated and saturated with the heat of the common furnace. This great compression of the wicked in hell is represented to us by Holy Scripture under another striking figure. 'They are laid in hell like sheep; death shall feed upon them.' * They will be not as sheep in a pasture, but as slain in the shambles, and piled one upon another." Therefore, the place also of the damed is eternal.

III. The fire which is never to be quenched is likewise everlasting. Christ Himself teaches this truth in these express words: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire."† Do you hear, "*Ever-*

* Psalm xlviii. 15. † Math. xxv. 41

lasting fire?" The wrath of divine indignation enkindleth this fire, and it shall never be smothered or quenched, according to the testimony of Isaiah: "The breath of the Lord as a torrent of brimstone enkindleth it."* It shall burn day and night, and "shall not be quenched."† And "the smoke thereof shall ascend up for ever and ever."‡ Eternal life and eternal death, says St. Augustine, are correlatives. To say, then, that eternal life will have no end, and that eternal death will have an end, is an absurdity. Who, therefore, will defer his conversion?

IV. As all things we have just mentioned are eternal, so also the worm and the conscience stung with bitterest remorse for past offences. "Their worm shall not die," said the Prophet Isaiah.§ The ancient poets translated this from Holy Scripture into their fables. For what else is Tityus, described by Virgil, whose liver is daily gnawed and torn in pieces by vultures, but during the night healed and made sound again, that these birds of prey may, each succeeding day, renew their lacerations? What is the vulture, but the worm

* Ch. xxx. 33. † Ch. lxvi. 24. ‡ Apoc. xiv. 11.
§ Ch. lxvi. 24.

that dieth not? And what is the liver, but the conscience always gnawed and tormented by unceasing remorse?

V. To this eternity of hell, belongeth likewise, the last sentence and the decree of Christ, the Judge of all men; a decree irrevocable, immutable, eternal! There is no appeal to another tribunal, no revocation of the decision, no revision before councillors, no postponement, no private arrangement of that which has been once pronounced by the just Judge. The decree can never be blotted out; it will stand for everlasting ages. Our holy mother the Church* often chants in her office for the dead this salutary admonition: Let the fear of death alarm me, who am sinning daily, and without repentance, "because there is no redemption in hell." No! absolutely none! No! nothing but eternal desperation! Even the blood of Christ, poured out upon Golgotha, though most efficacious for the atonement of sin, cannot reach, cannot be applied to the damned. "If the yoke of the Lord," says St. Bernard, "be a yoke of penance, you fancy that in itself it is not sweet; whereas it is exceedingly sweet in comparison with that fire of which

* Offices Mort. Noct. iii. Resp. I.

it is said, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.' "

VI. That which is without termination in hell, is usually termed the pain of loss: that is, the eternal privation of the sight of God. This, together with the other torments of the reprobate, admits of no alleviation, because there is no opportunity in hell of making satisfaction for sin. Though these torments shall continue many millions of years, yet there will be conceded not a single day, a single hour, or a single moment of respite from suffering. There will, indeed, be variety of vicissitude in their punishment, but only to their greater pain and sorrow. Christ has often and eloquently put before us this warning: "The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into the exterior darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* "Weeping" on account of the fire, and "gnashing of teeth" through icy coldness. How, then, can man so far forget both himself and God, so far degenerate into a beast, yea, with the hardness of adamant, think of the unutterable and inexplicable torments of hell, which will never end, and not fear and tremble, and chide himself

* Math. viii. 12.

after this manner: "I am for certain in the way to Eternity, and I know not how soon I may come to the end of my journey. I am, forsooth, sitting at present on the very steps of Eternity, and the slightest breath would be a force sufficient to hurl me into the gulf beneath!"

If it appear intolerable to man to lie upon a soft feather bed and pass a single night without sleep, in sighs and groans from head-ache, tooth-ache, from the stone, or from pain in any one of his members, if a night spent thus seems tediously long, and the day afar off, and the sun very slow at rising, if such a night, though passed upon a soft feather couch, as we have mentioned, appear longer than a week, though with patience he may hope for comfort from the following day and relief from the physician; if this, we repeat, be intolerable, Oh, how intolerable must it be to lie night and day in flames of fire, for a thousand—ten thousand, yea, ten hundred times a hundred thousand years! How intolerable—pardon this repetition—to watch, to hunger, to thirst, to burn, to be tormented extremely in every member, without hope of refreshment, without any, even the slightest rest, to be always on the rack of despair, and

thus to be preyed upon by fire, thus excruciated for millions of ages, without the possibility of ever seeing the end of this misery! yea, even worse still, to be without the power of hoping for an end! "There," says the Imitation of Christ,* "one hour of suffering will be more painful than a hundred spent here in the most rigid penance. There, there is no rest, no comfort for the damned." "O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy indignation, nor chastise me in Thy wrath."† "The sins of my youth and my ignorance do not remember."‡ Unless, O Lord, Thou hast mercy, I must necessarily perish.

CHAPTER II.

WHY IS HELL ETERNAL?

A subject may here be proposed for our consideration, worthy of the best attention of every sincere Christian. A God infinitely good and infinitely merciful, whose mercies are above all His works, justly

* Book I. ch. 24. † Psalm vi. 1.

‡ Psalm xxiv. 7

punishes for all eternity one mortal sin, committed in a moment, or even only wilfully entertained in thought, so that the sinner can never be sufficiently punished; and however many millions of years may pass away, it will never be said: he has received punishment enough, he has made satisfaction for his offence, he has blotted out the malignant thought by which he provoked the wrath of God! The sounder theologians teach, that every morose delight is a mortal sin. A morose delight is committed when any one revolves in his mind an impure and lustful thought, not, indeed, wishing to perpetrate the action suggested, but willingly and deliberately dwelling upon, and taking delight in the thought or evil representation, knowing it to be sinful. Has God, I ask, for this one thought, decreed the chastisement of everlasting fire? What equality, pray, is there between a sin perpetrated in an instant, and which is hurtful to no one, and everlasting punishment? Why doth the royal prophet exclaim not once, but twenty-seven times in the same Psalm:* "Praise the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever;" if, at the same time, He is so

* cxxxv.

exceedingly severe? To this question, St. Augustine, St. Gregory, St. Thomas of Aquin,* and others, reply: That every mortal sin is in its own nature infinite; because it is an offence against the infinite Majesty of God. Moreover, he who without true sorrow dies guilty of mortal sin, does the same as if he were to sin eternally, and would sin on for ever, were it permitted him to live for ever. For he has not parted with his will to offend God, but with his life only, in which he may sin; so that if his life were continued, he would continue in his transgression. Hence he does not cease to sin, but to live a life susceptible of sin.

Let us consider further, that a damned person can never make adequate satisfaction, whatever payment he may tender; since being the enemy, and not the friend of God, his payment, together with himself, is unworthy of acceptance. But in reality such a one does not discharge any portion of debt, for this reason;—he does nothing but suffer the punishment inflicted upon him contrary to his will. Let us illustrate this truth by example. Suppose a person borrows from his neighbour a thousand

* Lib. I. 2, qr. 87, art. 5, ad 2.

crowns, and for the interest of this sum makes over to him for ever the rent of his house. In twenty years, we will say, he has paid back by means of this rent the whole of the principal he borrowed. What then? Has he discharged his obligation? Is there nothing further due to his neighbour? The answer must be in the affirmative. The whole of the loan remains to be paid; for nothing has been paid but the interest. For the nature of such loans, or mortgages, is plainly this;—though the interest be paid punctually every year, yet the entire principal remains due. In like manner it is with the reprobate; for although they suffer ever so much torment, they can never extricate themselves from debt. They are the perpetual debtors, the eternal tributaries of God. The Prophet Isaiah states their case thus: "Your strength shall be as the ashes of tow, and your work as a spark; and both shall burn together, and there shall be none to quench it."* Suetonius† relates that Tiberius Cæsar, when petitioned by a certain offender to hasten on his punishment, and put a termination to his sufferings, made this reply: "*Be patient—you and I are not yet*

* Ch. i. 31. † Lib. 3, cap. 6.

friends." Christ is a just judge, and no tyrant, no Tiberius. Yet if one of the damned, after burning in hell for a thousand years, should ask for a speedy death, the same reply would be made to him: "*Be patient—you and I are not yet friends.*" Again, if after many thousand years the same petition should be presented, Christ, the Judge, would make the same answer: "*Be patient—you and I are not yet friends.*" Yea, if after a hundred thousand, or rather millions multiplied by millions of years, he should still persist in making the same request, he would always meet with the same rebuff: "*Be patient—you and I are not yet friends.*" The time was, would the Judge say, when I offered you a thousand times over my grace and my friendship, but you repulsed me. I wished to be your friend, your father, but you would not be my son. I dissembled, I held my peace, I waited forty, fifty, sixty years, to see if you would change your mind, and your course of life. But there followed no serious, no lasting penance. "Because I called, and you refused: I stretched out my hand, and there was none that regarded. You have despised all my counsels, and have neglected my reprehen-

sions. I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock when that shall come upon you which you feared."* Eat, therefore, the fruit of your own devices, and be filled with your own counsels. My justice will return you no other answer after infinite ages but this: "*Be patient—you and I are not yet friends.*" O ye heavens! O God! O sin! O precipitation of mankind into the pit of torments, into the lamentable abyss of Eternity! But Thou, O Lord, art just, and Thy judgments are righteous. Yea, just and equitable is it that he who would not by penance accept of mercy, when it was offered, should by punishment be tormented, and henceforth have justice without mercy for his portion for ever.

CHAPTER III.

OTHER MOTIVES TO THE CONSIDERATION OF ETERNITY DRAWN FROM NATURE.

We will now pursue our considerations of Eternity from the school of nature. In certain rocks and mountains of the earth

* Prov. i. 25.

there gush up fountains of hot water, the streams of which, in their downward course, produce so great a noise and murmuring, that infirm persons who resort to them for the benefit of their health—if on entering the bath they fancy that they hear musical sounds united in harmony—have their ears so stunned with the continual reverberation, that the sounds, which at first were pleasant and melodious, become by force of imagination very disagreeable, and a real torment; but if they imagine that they hear the beating of a drum, or any other louder instrument, they become at length distracted and almost raving, through the incessant molestation they endure from the painful noise.* From this we are led, as if by the hand, to the meditation of Eternity. The clamour, the weeping, the howling, which are heard at the entrance of hell, and reverberate within the infernal mountains, will never cease their tumultuous noise, and will not only distract the ear, and excruciate the imagination, but will suffer no mitigation from custom, or from the length of their endurance. In heaven, on the contrary, this thrice sacred hymn, holy, holy, holy, will create no weariness in the minds

* Felix Faber, lib. , de rebus Suenciis.

of the blessed, but will be heard by them, every time it is repeated, with renewed delight.

Christ, in His conversation with the Samaritan woman, makes mention of Eternity and eternal life more than twenty times. "He that shall drink of the water that I will give him, shall not thirst for ever. But the water that I will give, shall become a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting."* Would to heaven that, with the Samaritan woman, we thirsted for this water, and asked for it with fervent prayer! "O Lord, give me this water, that I may not thirst." Give, O Christ, but a drop of this water, or at least a thirst for eternal life.

Nature supplies us with another lesson. In the year A.D. 81,† as Suetonius, Dion, and Pliny the Younger, relate at large, on the first of November, at seven o'clock in the morning, a most terrific eruption burst forth from Mount Vesuvius, in Campania, preceded by a great drought and serious commotions of the earth. There was likewise heard a rumbling noise within the

* St. John, iv. 13, 14.

† Melmoth, in his translation of Pliny's Letters, says that this eruption of Mount Vesuvius happened in the year A.D. 79, the first year of the Emperor Titus.

earth, resembling subterraneous thunder, as if the mountains had met together in deadly conflict. Great stones fell from above; the atmosphere was filled with smoke and fire blended together; the sun withdrew its light, whereupon many concluded that the world had come to an end, and was about to be reduced to chaos, and consumed by fire. So great a quantity of ashes filled the air, and fell both upon land and sea, that they inflicted great injury upon man and beast, and killed the fishes in the sea, and the birds in the air, and destroyed the two cities, Herculaneum and Pompeii, whilst the people were in the theatre.*

* The following is Pliny's description of this terrific event, as translated by Melmoth, vol. i., B. vi., Letter XX.

"My uncle having left us, (at Naples,) I continued the employment which prevented my going with him (his uncle perished by suffocation from a stream of sulphur) till it was time to bathe; after which I went to supper, and then fell into a short and unquiet sleep. There had been, during many days before, some shocks of an earthquake, which the less alarmed us as they are frequent in Campania; but they were so particularly violent that night, that they not only shook everything around us, but seemed, indeed, to threaten total destruction. My mother flew to my chamber, when she found me rising in order to awaken her. We went out into a small court belonging to the house, which separated the sea from the buildings. As I was at that time but eighteen years of age, I know not whether I should call my behaviour in this perilous conjuncture courage or rashness; but I took up Livy, and amused myself with turning over that author, and even making extracts from him, as if I had been perfectly at my ease. While we were in this situation, a friend of my uncle's, who was just come from Spain, joined us, and

Such caverns, precipices, and fiery mountains as these, which burn without ever being consumed, are lively examples which God is pleased to give to men, of

observing me sitting by my mother with a book in my hand, reproved her patience and my security; nevertheless I still went on with my author. It was now morning, but the light was exceedingly faint and languid; the buildings all around us tottered, and, though we stood upon open ground, yet, as the place was narrow and confined, there was no remaining without imminent danger; we therefore resolved to leave the town. The people followed us in the utmost consternation, and (as to a mind distracted with terror, every suggestion seems more prudent than its own) pressed in great crowds about us in our way out. Being advanced at a convenient distance from the houses, we stood still, in the midst of a most hazardous and tremendous scene. The chariots which we had ordered to be drawn out, were so agitated, backwards and forwards, though upon the most level ground, that we could not keep them steady, even by supporting them with large stones. The sea seemed to roll back upon itself, and to be driven from its banks by the convulsive motion of the earth; it is certain, at least, the shore was considerably enlarged, and several sea animals were left upon it. On the other side a black and dreadful cloud bursting with an igneous serpentine vapour, darted out a long train of fire, resembling flashes of lightning, but much larger. Upon this our Spanish friend, whom I mentioned above, addressing himself to my mother and me, with great warmth and earnestness, 'If your brother and your uncle,' said he, 'is safe, he certainly wishes that you may be so too; but if he perished, it was his desire, no doubt, that you might both survive him: why, therefore, do you delay your escape a moment?' We could never think of our own safety, we replied, while we were uncertain of his; upon which our friend left us, and withdrew from the danger with the utmost precipitation. Soon afterwards the cloud seemed to descend, and cover the whole ocean, as, indeed, it entirely hid the island of Capræa, and the promontory of Misenum. My mother conjured me to make my escape at any rate, which, as I was young, I might easily effect; as for herself, she said, her age and corpulency rendered all attempts of that sort impossible;

the eternal fire in the dungeon of hell, in which the bodies of the reprobate will burn for ever without destruction. Upon

however she would willingly meet death, if she could have the satisfaction of seeing that she was not the occasion of mine. But I absolutely refused to leave her, and, taking her by the hand, I led her on; she complied with great reluctance, and not without many reproaches to herself for being the occasion of retarding my flight. The ashes now began to fall upon us, though in no great quantity. I turned my head and observed behind us a thick smoke, which came rolling after us like a torrent. I proposed, while we had yet any light, to turn out of the high road, lest she should be pressed to death in the dark by the crowd that followed us. We had scarcely stepped out of the path when darkness overspread us, not like that of a cloudy night, or when there is no moon, but that of a room when it is shut up, and all the lights extinct. Nothing, then, was to be heard but the shrieks of women, the screams of children, and the cries of men; some calling for their children, others for their parents, others for their husbands, and only distinguishing each other by their voices; one lamenting his own fate, another that of his family; some wishing to die, from the very fear of dying; some lifting their hands to the gods; but the greater part imagining that the last and eternal night was come, which was to destroy both the gods and the world together. Among these there were some who augmented the real terrors by imaginary ones, and made the frighted multitude falsely believe that Misenum was actually in flames. At length a glimmering of light appeared, which we imagined to be rather the forerunner of an approaching burst of flame, (as in fact it was) than the return of day; however the fire fell at a distance from us. Then again we were immersed in thick darkness, and a heavy shower of ashes rained upon us, which we were obliged every now and then to shake off, otherwise we should have been overwhelmed and buried in a heap. I might boast that during all this scene of horror not a sigh or expression of fear escaped from me, had not my hope been founded on that miserable, though strong, consolation, that all mankind was involved in the same calamity, and that I imagined I was perishing with the world itself. At last this terrible darkness was dissipated by degrees, like a cloud, or smoke; the real day returned, and even the sun appeared,

this subject consult Tertullian,* but more especially Minutius† and Pacian.‡ See, O man, how nature precedes and leads thee on to the contemplation of Eternity.

In short, time itself is a sign, and as it were, a shadow of Eternity. Nature desires that, from the sign we should learn the thing signified, and from our time take some measure of Eternity. St. Augustine§ says: "This is the difference between things temporal and eternal: we love temporal things, more before we possess them, than when we have enjoyed them. They lose their value the moment we grasp them. Whereas the soul can be satiated with nothing but the secure and the incorruptible enjoyment of a happy Eternity. Things eternal, therefore, are more pleasing and delightful when we possess, than when we merely desire and long for them, because they will crown us with more happiness than either charity or faith could

though very faintly, and as when an eclipse is coming on. Every object that presented itself to our eyes (which were extremely weakened) seemed changed, being covered with white ashes, as with a deep snow."

* Apolog. ch. 48. † In Octavis.

‡ De Pœnit. et Confess.

§ In Sent—Sent, 270.

believe possible, or hope, in its greatest buoyancy, could prompt us to expect. Oh! how vile, then, should not the earth, which we must abandon so soon, be esteemed by us, when we lift up our eyes to heaven and behold an eternal home!"

CONSIDERATION III.

IN WHAT THE ANCIENT ROMANS CHIEFLY PLACED THEIR VIEW OF ETERNITY.

"Thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting."—Daniel, v. 27.

"He who weigheth his money more accurately than his life, appreciateth not the value of Eternity."

CONSIDERATION III.

IN WHAT THE ANCIENT ROMANS CHIEFLY PLACED THEIR VIEW OF ETERNITY.

Pliny the Younger, in his Second Letter to Tacitus, makes this observation: "Happy I deem those to be whom the gods have distinguished with the abilities either of performing such actions as are worthy of being related, or of relating them in a manner worthy of being read; but doubly happy are they, who are blessed with both these uncommon endowments." In like manner the Romans believed they could, in three ways, render their name immortal, and transmit it to posterity. In the first place, they committed to writing many remarkable achievements; many, indeed, that were excellent, but not all of this description,—not all chaste—not all virtuous. They have left on record the very blemishes of their character—their immoral friendships, and their shameful concupiscences, but not the honest and royal way to Eternity. How many books have

perished even before their authors? and, according to Plato, have been like to the gardens of Adonis, no sooner in existence and published, than forgotten. Works which afford immediate pleasure, afford not that pleasure long. But let us suppose that the writings of the Romans will survive the duration of time, not one of them can recall its author to life.

In the second place, the Romans not only composed excellent writings, but performed actions of various kinds, worthy of being recorded by the pens of eloquent and learned writers. We are taught to believe that they sought immortality in many ways, but found it in none. We do not deny that they excelled both at home and abroad in the science of politics and war. They were, indeed, great proficients in the arts and sciences, magnificent and profuse in their public spectacles, and in their presents, and marvellous in the architecture of their palaces, in their mausoleums, in their cemeteries, in their monuments, in their statues, as may be learnt from the few facts which I will here briefly mention.

Augustus appointed public games at his own expense four and twenty times, and

three and twenty times at the charge of the common treasury; now, not one of these exhibitions cost less than 2,500,000 crowns. The very meanest public show Augustus gave the Roman people, drained his purse of 1,250,000 crowns.

Nero gilt the whole of the theatre, both walls and ceiling, and made the furniture of the stage, and the things necessary for the performance of comedy, of solid gold. To this we may subjoin, the labels or dice scattered among the people, and marked with prizes, some of entire houses, others of fields or farms, slaves, servants, cattle, silver, or precious stones, in great number, which were immediately transferred to him who showed the label or dice, with the inscription of any of these things upon it. The same Nero gave, as a donative to a common soldier, the sum of 250,000 crowns. Agrippina, Nero's mother, commanded this sum to be piled upon a table, that she might thus silently reprimand her son for his prodigality. But, instead of receiving the admonition in good part, he took umbrage, and immediately gave another sum equal to the former, saying: "I forgot that I was giving so little."

He likewise entertained at Rome, during

nine months, King Tiridates, and spent every day upon his guest, 20,000 crowns, which amounted in the nine months, to 5,400,000 crowns. And at his departure he gave him for his journey, 2,500,000 more. What shall I say of their superb edifices?

The Emperor Caligula built a bridge over an arm of the sea, three miles long. There were in the city of Rome 424 temples, and most of them very magnificent. Domitian spent, in gilding the capitol, seven millions of money. On the steps, or seats of the amphitheatre, which were all of stone, 87,000 spectators might be comfortably seated. In the part of the building above the seats, there was a standing apartment, in what might be termed the gallery, for 12,000, so that the amphitheatre would contain altogether 99,000 people.

Besides a great many others, there were twelve public baths, built by the emperors, in which the citizens might bathe free cost. In the hot baths of Antoninus, there were 1,600 seats of polished stone, where just as many persons might bathe at their convenience. In the bath of Hetruscus, says Pliny, all the materials were of silver, the pipes for the conveyance of water, the

edging, or border of the bath, and the very floor. But let us pass on.

In Rome there were almost as many statues as men, and of no material inferior to gold or silver, besides a countless number of brass, marble, and ivory. Domitian possessed in the capitol a golden statue a hundred pounds weight. Commodus and Claudius had golden statues, each a thousand pounds weight. Claudius had also another in the rostrum, of silver. So valuable were they, that there was a certain officer, designated the count of Rome, appointed, with a great many soldiers under his authority, to guard and protect these statues.

An expeditious traveller would require five days to reach the termination of the Appian way. It extended from Rome to Capua, and was so broad that two carriages might meet and pass without any danger of collision, and so firm and solid that it appeared to be made but of one stone, and in no part was it loose or disjointed. There were many other high roads similar to this. Again, what respectable authors say of their aqueducts, is almost incredible. The Emperor Claudius spent seven millions and a half of gold in the completion of an

aqueduct. Six hundred men were employed merely in looking after and taking care of the water. These, indeed, were great works, but their projectors certainly deserve some reprehension for their extravagance.

There were certain sewers called Cloacæ, which were more marvellous than the above-mentioned splendid edifices. These sewers ran through the length and breadth of the city, and through them flowed streams of water to carry off all nuisances into the river. Many of these sewers or tunnels were so long and so high, that they may be ranked amongst the wonders of the world. But I need not pursue this subject further. What I have already mentioned will be sufficient for him who is conversant with ancient history, or who has heard of the great powers and wealth of the Romans. If not, let the reader consult the testimony of Suetonius, Dion Cassius, Pliny, Livy, and other authors who treat of the monuments of their countrymen. In the third place, the things which I have been recording are in themselves commendable. But the Romans governed their republic so prudently, that in war they were generally invincible; in arts and sciences

very superior to their neighbours, and in natural virtues very eminent; insomuch so that Cyneas, the ambassador of Pyrrhus, a very eloquent and intelligent person, when he had in vain solicited the Romans to form with his master a league which would not redound to their honour, reported on his return to Pyrrhus, "That he looked upon the city of Rome as a temple, and upon its senators as upon so many kings." So far we may extol the ancient Romans. But though otherwise prudent, yet in this they were mistaken, in placing their Eternity in such fleeting possessions, —possessions which had nothing eternal in themselves, which could not confer eternity upon others. If St. Augustine had been a guide and teacher to the Romans, he would have pointed out a more royal and a more secure way to Eternity. "We Christians do not," he says,* "esteem those emperors happy who have enjoyed a long reign, who have always been victorious over their enemies, or who have treasured up much wealth. No, these are but the gifts and consolations of this laborious life; and are often bestowed upon those who have no right to the life which is eternal." Who,

* Lib. V. de Civitate Dei, ch. 24.

then, in the judgment of St. Augustine, are to be reputed happy? Hearken, O ye emperors, kings, and princes. Who in the judgment of St. Augustine are to be reputed happy? "You," says this great saint, "will possess true and eternal happiness if you observe the following rules or laws:—

1st, The law of *Justice*, by ruling with equity, and hating the mask and the painted face of injustice.

2nd, The law of *Modesty*, by never allowing yourselves to be inflated by honours and acclamations, and by always remembering that you are still but men.

3rd, The law of the *Fear* and the *Love of God*, by earnestly propagating the true worship of God; by subjecting all human power to the Divine Majesty, and by serving God in fear and love.

4th, The law of *Desire*, by ardently desiring the eternal kingdom of heaven, where there will be no one envious of your power.

5th, The law of *Forgiveness*, by being prompt to pardon, but slow to revenge, and to inflict punishment only when the necessity of the state may require.

6th, The law of *Mercy and Liberality*, by

tempering the severities of the law with the oil of mercy, and the sweet odour of beneficence.

7th, The law of *Continency*, by the use of greater mortification in proportion as you are more exposed to the temptations of luxury.

8th, The law of *Temperance*, by striving for the mastery over your passions, rather than the conquest of nations.

9th, The law of *Humility and Prayer*, by studying to do all things, not through vain-glory, but for the attainment of eternal felicity, and by not neglecting the most excellent sacrifice of humility and prayer."

These laws St. Augustine has fixed upon the twofold gates of the world, that they may be a mirror to princes wherein they may see the rules of their conduct. But how much, O Romans, have you not departed from the gates to which these laws are attached? Not to speak of other matters, instead of the one true and living God, have you not introduced into your worship false deities, almost beyond calculation? For Rome seemed to make it a point of religion to reject no kind of erroneous worship; so that when she had obtained dominion over nations, she pre-

served their various superstitious doctrines.*

But to pass over these matters in silence, how vain and foolish was it for the Romans to wish to leave their Eternity behind them in parchment and paper, in marble and stone, in theatres and pyramids, in monuments and mausoleums? Oh! where now is this their Eternity of stone? The fate which befell Jerusalem has befallen Rome. One of the Apostles, pointing to the sacred edifice of the temple, said in admiration to our Blessed Redeemer: "Master, behold what manner of stones, and what buildings are here."† Jesus answering, said to him: "Seest thou all these great buildings? There shall not be left a stone upon a stone, that shall not be thrown down." So then there is nothing eternal in the world. Where, it may now be asked, is ancient Rome? The answer is simply, It was here! Where are they that built it? They are dead and gone! They have all perished! We know not even where their ashes lie. Ere long we must all follow in the same way. A few years and we shall be but shadows of that which was,—we shall return to the dust,

* St. Leo Sermo L. Nat. Apost.

† Mark xiii. 1.

and be undistinguishable from the cold earth around us. Oh! how poor is the condition even of the greatest of mortals! How unstable the very strongest of human beings! even in the prime of manhood! What hath become of all these? Where are they? They have vanished! Where is the wealth they piled up to an amount almost beyond credibility? It is scattered to the winds. Where are their magnificent works? Their place is nowhere to be found. So all things else, though they may appear great to us, are equally shadows, the dreams of a moment, when compared to Eternity, and to things which are eternal. The foundation upon which the edifice of human vanity is erected is but of shifting sand, and Eternity is not the characteristic property inscribed upon stone and marble. Well doth Lactantius observe: "That the works of mortals are but mortal like themselves." That there were such cities as a Babylon, a Troy, a Carthage, a Rome, we believe with confidence. But if we were to believe no more than we see, there is scarcely a trace of them remaining to convince us of this truth. In like manner the seven wonders of the world, Nero's golden palace, Diocletian's hot baths, the

bath of Antoninus, Severus's Septizonium, the Colossus of Julius, Pompey's amphitheatre, have left no vestiges of their existence, and scarcely a record in history. Oh! how far short is not all this of Eternity!

CHAPTER I.

HOW FAR THE ROMANS HAVE GONE ASTRAY FROM THE TRUE WAY OF ETERNITY.

In the private oratory of our Blessed Lady at Nazareth, the angel mentioned a kingdom, "of which there shall be no end."* This was not the kingdom of Solomon, which continued in existence until the Babylonian captivity, that is, four hundred years. This was not the kingdom of Rome, nor of Persia, nor of Greece. For, where are now these kingdoms, once so flourishing? Where, indeed, are the ancient monarchies? How mighty a king was not Nabuchodonosor, in Chaldea and Syria? Also Baltassar, one of his successors. From them the sceptre passed to the Medes and Persians, to Cyrus and

* Luke i. 33.

Darius. A little while and it travelled to Greece, and came into the power of Alexander the Great, king of Macedon, an exceedingly warlike and fortunate monarch. But in his successors fortune departed with the departure of military valour, and the sceptre was translated into Italy, and grasped, first by Julius Cæsar, and then by Octavius Augustus. Where now are these emperors? Do thou, dear Christian brother, seek the kingdom "of which there shall be no end." Numantia, Athens, Carthage, and Sparta, have sunk into ruins, yea, have totally perished. But of the kingdom which is above "there shall be no end." The King that ruleth this ethereal kingdom, together with His subjects, is eternal. "The Lord shall reign for ever and ever."* Upon these words Origen makes the following comments: "Do you believe that the Lord will reign for ever and ever? Yea He will reign beyond this; and say whatever you please, you will not be able to express the duration of His kingdom." The Prophet will always subjoin; He will still reign on, and again beyond this, and beyond any expression within the power of the mortal tongue.

* Exod. xv. 18.

St. Isidore observes, "Though His kingdom is eternal, immense, and every way happy, and the whole of it promised to us, yet what a profound silence do we not keep upon this important subject? For what man in a thousand devoteth the smallest portion of the day in meditating upon these truths? Who teacheth them to his wife, his children, his servants? We talk much upon every subject but heaven, of which we make little or no mention. We are all very eloquent in extolling our native land, but of our true country, the native air of our souls, we are almost ashamed to speak. For many, through the disuse of holy conversation, think themselves neither witty nor facetious, unless they babble about trifles—unless they ostentatiously boast of their lascivious jests, and their lips run over with obscene and filthy talking; yea, unless they do all this, they fancy themselves both unsocial and ill-mannered. Oh! what a fearful wandering from the right path! Whereas, our hearts, our thoughts, our mouths, our conversation, ought to be filled with, ought to breathe of, nothing but Eternity, for we can hope for no true glory but that which is eternal."

The Jewish Elders, that they might

render their government everlasting, by the destruction of the power of Christ, assembled together in council,* and by their extreme folly, which they mistook for prudence, they drew down upon themselves the doom which they so greatly feared. St. Augustine thus describes them deliberating together in full assembly: "The chief Priests and Pharisees took council together, but they did not say, Let us believe. Those wicked men thought more about how they might injure in order to destroy, than how they might provide for their own safety, lest they should perish."† And nevertheless, they feared whilst they were in consultation, for they said: "What do we, for this man doth many miracles. If we let him alone, all men will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation."‡ They were afraid to lose temporal things, and never thought of eternal life, and so lost both. Such also is the vanity of our thoughts and foolish affections. Who are we? What is that which we call ours? To-day we flourish as the flower of the field,—we are commended by others, and

* John xi. 17.

† Tract 49, in Joan. sub. fin. ‡ John xi. 48.

esteemed agreeable companions in society. To-morrow the flower will wither, and droop to the earth,—we shall displease those whom we were anxious to please, as well as God, whose good pleasure we have never heartily desired. We totally neglect heaven, and yet we cannot retain possession of the earth. We obtain not the friendship of God, and yet we lose that of the world, so that both by God and men, we are left miserable and destitute. If death spared those who are happy in this world, they might find in this good fortune something to boast of; I say—something; for there can be no true glory but that which is in heaven and eternal. But death spares no one. He pierces through the deepest darkness, whilst he himself remains invisible; and he watches an opportunity when we are off our guard, to inveigle us into his snares. What will become of us if we lead wicked lives? Shall we not first be summoned to the judgment seat of Christ, and then descend into the gloomy prison of hell? From this prison no rank or nobility can set us free; there no power can protect us; no applause of men which we may have formerly received, will afford us any comfort

or hope of deliverance. The favour of the Lord alone, which is obtained by the contempt of human glory, will preserve us from the fearful abyss of reprobation. There is no true glory but that which is eternal.

Solomon, in the Book of Proverbs,* depicteth wisdom as a queen, accompanied by two handmaids, Eternity and Glory,—the first on the right hand, the second on the left. Glory is of no value without Eternity, of which all Christians are in expectation. "For we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come" †—"eternal in heaven."‡ "The just shall be in everlasting remembrance."§ To give an alms to the poor, to moderate the sensual appetite, to resist impurity,—these are not great works, neither do they require much time in their performance; yet the remembrance of them, together with their reward, shall be eternal. What a small matter did not Mary Magdalen bestow upon our Saviour's feet,—a few tears and a little ointment! How quickly, too, had she accomplished her charity! And yet this action is made known to all

* iii 13.

† Heb. xiii. 1. ‡ 2 Corinth. v. 1. § Psalm xl. 7.

the world.* Others would probably have admired the rosy hue of her cheeks, her fair complexion, her beautiful figure, the freshness and the delicacy of her youth, her pleasing gracefulness, her great riches, her exceeding affability and courtesy, with other similar accomplishments. These, however, were not the qualifications Christ commended, but the kind office she exercised towards Him in washing His feet. An alms, certainly not great, and yet it obtained for her eternal glory and immortal renown: "Wherever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, that also which she hath done, shall be told for memory of her." This is the testimony of Christ Himself. So that this one action, though not engraven on brass or marble, nor published in the market-place, nor proclaimed to the sound of music; yet hath it continued a memorial of her to this day, and will continue so for ever,—"shall be told for a memory of her."

Now, if we consider the action itself, Judas Iscariot, the avaricious purse-bearer, found great fault with it, asking, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hun-

* Matt. xxvi. 13.

dred pence, and given to the poor?"* And Simon, the proud Pharisee, loudly condemned it. If we consider the value of the gift, it was but a box of ointment, worth at the most, three hundred pence. If we regard the place where this act of kindness was performed, it was simply a private residence,—the house of Simon, the Pharisee. If we direct our view to the witnesses present, they were not many, the guests of a dinner party. If we inquire who was the individual that did this kindness, the answer is, a woman of unfortunate character. And yet, notwithstanding these insignificant circumstances, it will be told "in memory of her to the end of the world."

How many emperors have planted their victorious standards in the very camp of their enemies? How many valiant generals have praiseworthily commanded powerful armies? How many prudent magistrates have governed with wisdom populous provinces? How many kings have erected illustrious monuments, statues, castles, and cities? How many learned men have put their minds on the rack, have pushed their ingenuity to its utmost stretch, in the

* John xi. 6.

discovery of something new, and, like chymists, have by their pen distilled their brain into paper? And for what purpose? That they might be extolled amongst men of renown, and held in perpetual remembrance. But what is their doom? The silence of the night—the oblivion of the grave! One good action, however, of the just, confers an immortal name, which neither time nor envy shall ever efface, and which shall be spoken of with reverence, and heard in respectful silence by generals, kings, and prelates,—"shall be told in memory of her to the whole world!"

The only way, therefore, to a glorious immortality, is to live well, and to die well. Go, then, ye Romans, and seek your eternity in statues and marble monuments, and in those things in which you can never find it. For my part, I will unite in sentiment with St. Jerome, who, in his life of St. Paul, the first hermit, thus breathed forth his desires: "Remember Jerome, a sinner, who, if God had given him his choice, would have preferred the mantle of Paul, with his good works, to the purple robes of kings, and their mighty kingdoms." Let us transfer, ere we lose them,

our riches, and send them before us to heaven, which is open for their reception. We have no occasion to fear the transference, for the notaries, who are the poor and the needy, are strictly faithful and trustworthy. We give them a few worthless things, a little perishable dust, in exchange for the greatest treasure,—for an eternal weight of glory in heaven.* So Christ has promised upon the performance of this precept: "I say to you: Make unto yourselves friends of the Mammon of iniquity; that when you shall fail, they may receive you into everlasting dwellings."† But let us pass from the Romans to other important considerations.

CHAPTER II.

A BETTER WAY TO ETERNITY THAN THE FORMER.

Darius, king of the Persians, and well known for his massacre of the Babylonians, had in his army a phalanx of ten thousand chosen men, whom he called the immor-

* 2 Corinth. iv. 17. † Luke xvi. 9.

tals,* not, indeed, because they would never die, (for where can men be found in this world immortal?) but because when any of them fell sick, or died, their places in the ranks were immediately filled up, so that there were in the phalanx never more, and never less, than ten thousand. Thus Darius framed for himself a species of immortality, an eternity of service. But how brief was its duration! For he and his whole army shortly afterwards perished. "The princes and the governors craftily suggested to the king, and spoke thus unto him: King Darius, live for ever."† Oh! how vain was this wish! how short the span of this eternity! "Our years shall be considered as a spider; the days of our years in them are three score and ten years,—but if in the strong they be four-score years, what is more of them is labour and sorrow."‡ "At the very most the number of the days of man are a hundred years: as a drop of water of the sea are they esteemed; and as a pebble of the sand, so are a few years compared to Eternity."§ To think, therefore, of living for ever is but an idle dream. Hence it was

* Cœlius Rhodiginus, lib. 8. cap. 2. and lib. 25. cap. 1.

† Dan. vi. C. ‡ Psalm lxxxix. 9. § Eccles. xviii. 8.

not without just cause, that Xerxes, according to the testimony of Herodotus, when he went forth to conquer Greece, on surveying from an eminence his vast army of four millions of soldiers, wept abundant tears. When asked his reason, he replied: "In fifty or sixty years, out of all this multitude of strong and chosen men, not one will be found in the land of the living," Imagine whatever eternities we may please, "we shall all die, and like waters that return no more, fall down into the earth."†

A better emblem of Eternity was invented at Constantinople. In the year of our Lord 559, the Church of Constantinople, during the episcopate of Gennadius, was favoured by the establishment of a new and noble monastery, dedicated to St. John the Baptist, and peopled by Acœmets, that is, monks who never slept, because they never took their rest at one and the same time, but sung in alternate choirs the praises of God, day and night. These monks were divided into three classes; so that when the first had finished its portion of the divine office, the second succeeded, and then the third; and by this means they represented

† 2 Kings xiv. 14.

the ever wakeful choirs of heaven; and consequently the celestial eternity; in which the praise of God constitutes, without any weariness, the supreme happiness of the heavenly citizens. Well therefore, does the royal Psalmist exclaim: "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house O Lord; they shall praise Thee for ever and ever."* Then shall all the blessed say what St. Peter uttered in his rapture on Mount Thabor: "It is good, Lord, for us to be here."† For St. Bernard in his discourses on the Canticles, declareth "Eternity to be real wealth, beyond all measure or calculation." And in his second sermon on the Feast of All Saints, he subjoins: "But Eternity is found by no one who doth not seek for it with perseverance." We ask you then, O blessed Bernard, how is it to be sought for? Listen I pray you to the answer of this holy Father: "By *poverty*, *meekness*, and *weeping*, a certain image or similitude of Eternity is formed in the soul. First by *poverty*, we deserve future possessions." "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."‡ Where the poor are despised and aban-

* Psalm lxxxiii. 5. † Matt. xvii. 4.

‡ Matt. v. 3.

doned, there, the heart, together with its pelf, are secured beneath the lock and key of the money chest. Where riches are dispensed by the rigid rules of avarice, there can be no love, no affection for poverty, and consequently no desire of Eternity. Secondly, by *meekness* we make ourselves sure of things present as well as future: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land."* If any one ask, What we say of him, who has no meekness, no patience, and from whom is never heard a kind word,—if asked, what profit he hath from his intolerable impatience,—what advantage it is to him to fret, and fume, and rage, and storm with indignation, and cry out in the tumult of passion, and then overturn all things, and salute no one civilly, or show any kind of affability? If asked, what we say of such a man, and of such conduct? We reply, that he will either lose his property, or his good name, but probably both. For he enjoyeth not the riches which he hath, but keepeth them like a dog, which is ever ready to bark at a man, and then fly upon him, and bite him. With respect to his reputation, if he possess one, it will not, of a certainty,

* Ibid. 5.

be improved by the qualification of impatience. And as for heaven, he forfeits it before he is put in possession of it. Thirdly, by *weeping* we recover what we prodigally lost by sin. But this penitential weeping must not be the fleeting sorrow of an hour or a day. No; for what should we think of the son, who, at his mother's death, shed a few tears, put on mourning, and saw her body committed safely to the grave, and then, on the same or the following day, changed his suit of black for one of fashionable colours, and in place of the warm tear, adorned his face with rosy smiles? This would not be a sincere and earnest, but a mere mock sorrow. Yet, alas! this is what we ourselves are guilty of very commonly. To-day we weep for our sins in the tribunal of penance, and fortify our souls with the life-giving manna of the holy communion; to-morrow we sin again deliberately, and more grievously than before. We detest our former life, and yet willingly return to it. We forswear our past crimes, and the very same day renew them. So that with the same tongue with which we proclaim Jesus Christ innocent, we cry out, "crucify him! crucify him!" just as if we were

cousins-german to Pontius Pilate, who in the same breath in which he declared he found no cause of death in our Divine Redeemer, sentenced Him to execution upon the ignominious tree of the cross! Oh! how fickle and inconstant! but in nothing more fickle, more inconstant, than our frequent relapses into a vicious course of life! We carry, alas! too much of the moon, emblem of restless change in our frail bosoms! Sometimes piety is so pleasing to us, that we can scarcely allow a smile to ruffle the gravity of our demeanour, lest it should put our sanctity out of countenance. With downcast eye and inclined forehead, we seem angry at the slightest intrusion upon this our devout turn of mind. But alas! this sanctity is of short duration! In a little while we begin to hate piety, and when the stream is turned we rush back, like the ebb of tide, to our former scenes of dissipation—our former riot and intemperance. We are just as ready to dissolve the friendship which we had contracted with God, as a short time previous we had been anxious to cement it. And when we are thus again in the midst of sin, piety renews her appeals for admittance into our souls, and

with the aid of penance, drives away lasciviousness, until we again begin to be ashamed of our repentance. Thus we rarely continue long in the way of virtue, which we find too laborious, and at every slight temptation we again run down the stream of folly and wickedness. Such is the inconstancy of our life, that it places before our minds all kinds of pleasures and vices. Outwardly, indeed, we appear to adore *virtue*, but inwardly we fall down, and with a most toilsome service, pay homage to *vice*. This is not the way to Eternity, save to an eternity of fearful chastisement, and excruciating torments, which will have no end!

But let us single out from amongst Catholics one who has given himself up to voluptuousness, and let us conduct him to a furnace red hot, and throwing out fierce flames of fire, and let us, whilst he is there, put to him the following questions: "How much pleasure would you demand for a single day's confinement in this raging furnace?" Undoubtedly he would reply, "I would not allow myself to be cast into these flames for the possession of the whole world, or for all the pleasures the world could give me." Then let us moderate our pro-

position and ask, what reward he would require to remain in the furnace but half a day? "Offer," he would say, "whatever you please, there is nothing so delicious or so precious, which I would purchase at the price of such torments." We will altar our terms once more, and put the question more simply: "What remuneration, or what pleasure would you insist upon as your recompense for entering into this glowing furnace, and continuing there but one short hour?" His reply would still be with a negative. "Let," he would probably say, "the most covetous and the most impudent man in existence push his demands to the utmost of his cravings, they would bear no comparison with the scorching and inward tortures to be endured but for a single hour in this devouring fire." If these answers are perfectly consonant to right reason, how happens it, O God, that for a little gain, and that but contemptible, for deceitful honour, and that but transient, for filthy pleasures, and these but for a moment, so many men set at nought the eternal punishment of the flames of hell? We cannot be persuaded to throw ourselves into a furnace of temporal fire, even for a single hour, by all the bribes the

world can tender to us, and yet we do not fear the everlasting fires of Gehenna, provided gain inviteth us, or honour smileth upon us, or pleasures entice us with their honied baits. You will reply, perhaps, that you hope for a better termination to your earthly pilgrimage than this. The infinite goodness of God forbids you to judge so unfavourably of your future destiny. This is our usual language. And the words themselves would not be impious, were our actions really virtuous. But to say the least of it, it is exceedingly rash and dangerous to live a life of wretchedness, and then expect an Eternity of happiness amongst the blessed. Oh, remember that one mortal sin is sufficient for our eternal reprobation! Know you not what Christ has threatened? "Whosoever shall say to his brother: Thou fool, shall be guilty of hell fire."* Know you not that Christ has said: "That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart."† Do you forget the admonition of Jesus Christ? "Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth

* Math. v. 22. † Ibid. 28.

the will of my Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven."* Are you not aware that Christ will exclude many from His kingdom? "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. He that taketh not up his cross and followeth me, is not worthy of me."† Are you ignorant that Christ hath publicly and gravely repeated, "Many are called, but few are chosen?"‡ Few, indeed, very few! How often hath not Christ, even to your own full knowledge, exhorted you to an amendment of life: "Amen, I say unto you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.....And if thy hand or thy foot scandalize thee, cut it off and cast it from thee. It is better for thee to enter into life maimed or lame, than, having two hands or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire."§ "Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish."‖ And presently afterwards: "Strive to enter by the narrow gate: for many I say

* Math. vii. 21. † Math. x. 37, 38.
‡ Math. xx. 16. xxii. 14.
§ Math. xviii. 3--8. ‖ Luke xiii. 3.

to you, shall seek to enter, and shall not be able."* Are you unacquainted with St. Paul's special catalogue of those crimes which exclude from eternal happiness? "Now the works of the flesh are manifest; which are fornication, uncleanness, immodesty, luxury, idolatry, witchcraft, enmities, contentions, emulations, wrath, quarrels, dissensions, sects, envy, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like, of the which I foretell you, as I have foretold you, that they who do such things, shall not obtain the kingdom of God."† Now, if any man be conscious of any one of these offences, and is not sorry for it in such manner as to take every measure within his power to avoid it for the time to come, he may sing to himself the delusive song of hope, but his hope is vain—is mere presumption. To incur the danger of stripes and wounds, is a risk attended by no great amount of evil. To lose at play a hundred or a thousand florins, is serious, but it might be far worse. To stake one's head, or to place one's life in jeopardy, is certainly a very great hazard. But to peril our eternal salvation, the loss both of soul and body, and this for eternity, by trusting to uncer-

* Ibid. 24. † Galat. v. 19, &c.

tainties, confiding in mere words, whilst our actions are a denial of our doctrine, is surely the very climax of all evils, the heaviest of all losses, the most fatal and pernicious of all hazards, the extreme height of all folly and madness! "Understand these things, you that forget God, lest He snatch you away, and there be none to deliver you."*

CHAPTER III

THE WAY TO ETERNITY OUGHT TO BE CAREFULLY AND DILIGENTLY SOUGHT FOR.

There is no Christian, who should not frequently ask both himself and those whom God has appointed to teach him: What must I do to obtain eternal happiness? Am I in the right way to this Eternity of bliss? Something, indeed, I am doing, but it is very trifling. I breathe after—I long for the joys that are immortal; but are my works so few in number, and performed with so much languor and coldness, worthy of an eternal reward? I desire to arrive at the gate of a happy Eternity, but I

* Psal. xlix. 22

shudder at the narrowness and the ruggedness of the path, which, however narrow, however rugged, is the very best, the very safest which conducts to heaven. This is a truth which Christ has proclaimed with His own divine lips. "Enter ye in at the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction; and many (alas! far too many!) there are who enter by it. How narrow is the gate, and strait the way, which leadeth to life; and few there are (O yes, very few!) who find it."* And He repeats this admonition: "Strive to enter by the narrow gate; for many, I say to you, shall seek to enter, and shall not be able."† Oh! how formidable, how tremendous are these two words, *many* and *few!* Miserable creatures as we are, we still rashly promise to ourselves a happy Eternity, and under this delusion it is difficult to say, whether we really hope or dream in reckoning ourselves amongst the few that will be saved. Would to Heaven that "in this acceptable time and in this day of salvation,"‡ we turned a more attentive eye towards Eternity, and reasoned

* Math. vii. 13. † Luke xiii. 24.

‡ 2 Corinth. vi. 2.

within ourselves in the following manner. What is all that which I am now suffering, or that which I see others suffering—what is it all compared with Eternity? Yea, what if I could enumerate as many labours and perils as St. Paul underwent, and which he recounts in the eleventh chapter of his second Epistle to the Corinthians? What, if I had endured hunger and thirst, enmities and grievous injuries, sickness and poverty? Nay, more, if with St. Paul, I had been beaten with rods and suffered shipwreck? What are these trials and tribulations, in the scales with everlasting torments? In all my adversities, therefore, I should console myself with this reflection: I shall see an end of all these things.

The Prophet Daniel, after mentioning many calamities, concludes with these words: "and all these until the appointed, time." To what purpose do you who are in affliction, and sorrow, and distress, bathe yourselves in tears, and dash the whole of your life with bitter grief by the vain complaints of your impatience? Can you not draw very great consolation from the short duration of your sufferings? Are you assailed by a variety of afflictions? Do not

despond, their "appointed time" is drawing to an end. Are you annoyed by contumely, harassed by injustice, and tormented by various other evils? Forego your lamentations; all these your trials will continue but for a time, and not for eternity. Your tears will flow only for a little while, and they will not be followed by eternal weeping and mourning. You are made sorrowful in few things, and for a few moments, in many you will be well rewarded, and presently pass to everlasting happiness. This is the distinct affirmation of the Wise man: "A patient man shall bear for a time; and afterwards joy shall be restored to him."*

But you who imagine yourselves the happy ones—the favourites of the world, do not exalt the horn of your strength, for all your felicity is confined within very narrow limits, and extends to a very short span! You triumph for a while, your golden dreams of happiness last their appointed day; but in a short time death will tear off the mask of fortune, and oblige you to stand amongst the crowd. Then you will be the more miserable in proportion, as you fancied yourselves, during a

* Eccles. i. 9.

brief period, the more happy. All things, therefore, have their appointed time, save Eternity which is independent of all laws. Consequently, whether we suffer in mind or body, whether we lose our riches or our honours, whether our patience be exercised by sorrow or contradiction, whether we labour under any affliction inward or outward, let us remember that these trials are very trivial and momentary, compared with the torments of Eternity. For when, after the day of judgment, fifty millions of years shall have passed away, there will still remain fifty millions, and when these shall likewise have flown by, there will still be pressing onwards as many more, and ever, too, increasing beyond the power of human calculation, and this for ever! Who ponders upon these things in his heart? We do, indeed, sometimes endeavour to relish eternal truths, but our heart is full of vanity, and flies about from the past to the future, without any steadiness of purpose. What will arrest its fickleness, and gradually steady it to the gaze of eternal splendour which never changes?* Myrogenus acted nobly when he modestly refused the presents which Eustachius,

* Aug. Confess. lib. ii. c. 11.

Archbishop of Jerusalem, offered him, saying as he declined them: "Pray for me, that I may be delivered from everlasting torments." Neither was Cicero far from the truth when he said: "To a wise man nothing that is merely human appears great; for to him are known the greatness and the magnitude of the world."* But St. Francis of Assisium, a sincere lover of poverty, and a true contemplator of Eternity, had a far wiser saying than Cicero: "Here," he said, "there is little pleasure; but afterward immense pain. Here is a little labour; but afterwards eternal glory. Make your choice. Many are called; few chosen; and all rewarded," according to their works.

Whoever, therefore, finds his conscience burdened with one mortal sin, let him do penance in time; for it is far easier, and far more pleasant to be cleansed by water than by fire.† The present is the time of penance; let penance, therefore, be the preventive of punishment. "They that fear the hoar frost, the snow shall fall upon them."‡ He that feareth smaller obstacles shall stumble upon greater. He who

* Tusc. quæst. lib. 3.

† Guerricus Sermon 4 de Purif. ‡ Job vi 16.

shrinks from the light labour of penance, shall fall into the everlasting fire of hell. St. Gregory observes: "Some, whilst they dread temporal inconvenience, precipitate themselves into the gulf of eternal woe." Pacian has a similar saying: "Remember that in hell there is no opportunity of confession, no time or place for repentance; for the time of repentance has passed by never to return. Hasten, therefore, now whilst you are in the way. We are greatly in dread of temporal fire; and shrink back with horror from the instruments of the executioner. But what are these to the claws and the racks of demons, and the unquenchable flames of hell?" Here we may apply the words which St. Ambrose addressed to a fallen virgin: "Penance consists not in words, but in deeds. And the following considerations should animate you to perform it. Place before your eyes the great glory which you have forfeited, and that your name has been blotted out from the Book of Life. Believe that you have placed yourself near that fearful darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. And you who are fully persuaded that all these things are true, and that it is necessary for the sinful soul to be

given up to the pains of the bottomless pit, and the fires of Gehenna, and that there is no remedy after baptism but the solace of penance, what labours, what hardships, will you not cheerfully undergo, in order to be delivered from the everlasting punishment which is impending over you? The diseases of the body require purgation, so do the diseases of the mind require the purification of penance. That you may adopt this prudent measure, let the desire of salvation, the fear of eternal death, the horror of never ending torments, the hope of everlasting life and immortality, animate you, and lead you on to a firm and unshaken resolution. Whatever purifies the soul heartily embrace; whatever sullies it cautiously avoid. But nothing defiles the soul more than the corruptible body." Such is the wise counsel of St. Ambrose.

Grant, dear Jesus, that we may so possess these transient and perishable goods as not to lose our eternal inheritance. May we walk in the way of those of whom St. Augustine thus beautifully speaks: "Many prompted by the desire of their salvation have willingly submitted to the yoke of obedience, and who, though heretofore so proud and haughty, now seek humiliation

and abasement,—desire that which they before despised, hate that which they before coveted, and, as strangers and pilgrims here below, sigh after, with longing desires, their heavenly and eternal home. They prefer abstinence to delicacies, watching to sleep, and poverty to riches. Labour, arduous labour in the subjugation of their passions, they reckon pleasure. They love their enemies, and pardon injuries in the hope of an eternal reward." Oh! who would not labour, and labour strenuously for the attainment of an eternal reward!

CONSIDERATION IV.

HOW HOLY DAVID MEDITATED UPON ETERNITY, AND THE REASONS WHY WE SHOULD IMITATE HIM.

"I thought upon the days of old; and I had in my mind the eternal years."—PSALM lxxvii. 6.

"Thy arrows pass by me; the voice of thy thunder is round about me. The arrows of present punishment fly over my head. The voice of that horrible thunder: *Go, ye cursed into everlasting fire*, is like a wheel that is always turning, and will turn on for ever."

CONSIDERATION IV.

HOW HOLY DAVID MEDITATED UPON ETERNITY, AND THE REASONS WHY WE SHOULD IMITATE HIM.

That God should punish the apostate angels and wicked men condemned at the great day of judgment, with everlasting torments, appears to some so severe, so incredible, that even Origen, a writer of great talent, and very superior learning, and well versed, likewise, in Holy Scripture, hath been so presumptuous as to teach, in his Periarchôn, that the devils, as well as the damned, after they have been sufficiently purified by fire for their sins, will be restored to grace. St. Augustine, with many others, hath convicted him of, and condemned him for, this error.* Yet this heresy has found many abettors. Certain heretics, called the Aniti, disseminated it, under a variety of explanations, in Spain.

* Civit. Lib. 21. cap. 23. and the seq.

Some believed that all the damned, others that Christians alone, others that Catholics only, and finally, some that they alone who had been, during life, eminent for alms-deeds, would be set free from the prison of hell. Though St. Augustine has not refuted these several errors, yet the Holy Scripture hath done so most satisfactorily. "*Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.*" And again: "*These shall go into everlasting punishment, but the just into everlasting life.*"* Here no gloss, no interpretation, can be made favourable to the limitation of eternal punishment. Hence the Royal Prophet, who meditated with heartfelt pleasure both upon the past and the future, directed his attention more especially to the things to come: "Mine eyes to thee have prevented the morning, that I might meditate on thy words."† "My eyes prevented the watches; I was troubled and spoke not."‡ What, sweet bard of Sion, disturbed your slumbers? What business was so pressing as to cause you to break in upon the silence of the night, and ruffle the calmness of your soul?

* Math. xxv. 41, 46.

† Psalm cxviii. 148. ‡ Psalm lxxvi. 5.

Listen to his reply: "I thought upon the days of old; and I had in my mind the eternal years."* Behold that which broke his peaceful rest,—the comparison of the past with the future—"*the eternal years.*" And this profound contemplation engaged his attention not merely in the day, but during the night: "And I meditated in the night with my own heart; and I was exercised and I swept my spirit."† What prompted him to this nocturnal exercise? "Will God, then, cast off for ever, or will He never be favourable again? or will God forget to show mercy? or will He in His anger shut up His mercies?"‡ Behold his fear and dread of Eternity,—the perturbation of his mind at the thought of the divine judgments, lest God should punish him with everlasting torments! And what was the end or the effect of this meditation? He said: "Now I have begun; this is the change of the right hand of the Most High."‖ So that in a moment, as it were, he became better. He did not delay his repentance; he did not procrastinate and put off amendment of life, until his declining years. "Now I have begun:"

* Ibid. 6 † Ibid. 7.
‡ Ibid. 8, 10. ‖ Ibid. 11.

now, from this hour, or this day, I will lead a more virtuous life than I have hitherto done. So would I, some one might say, if I could meditate upon Eternity as holy David did. Then might I exclaim with cheerfulness and alacrity, "Now I have begun." But I am so involved in daily cares, so impeded by business, so distracted by the multiplicity of my offices, that I cannot accomplish this desirable object. I live amongst men; I hear and see much that is evil; so that there is no leisure, no opportunity for the mind to dwell upon so salutary a thought as that of Eternity. When we meet together in the social circle, and enjoy ourselves over the bowl, our conversation is upon subjects not at all calculated to introduce into our minds the grave consideration of things eternal. No; in our banquets we drink our wine, and amuse ourselves with trifles. All serious thoughts are banished the jovial board; our assemblies, in which we are united by friendship and good cheer, will not permit us to dwell upon the gloomy topics of the future world. No: we ask what news from Italy, France, and Spain? The things you tell us about,—heaven and hell,—are now old, have been

repeated so often, that they have become stale. We know them now well enough. Why, therefore, renew them even to loathsomeness? Thus there is no place, no time, no opportunity, wherein to speak of Eternity. Oh! how true, dear Christian brother, is this statement you have made of your faults. Would to heaven that you were as ready to amend them as you have been to confess them. It is too manifest and evident to every one, that in the world there is little or no care about Eternity, notwithstanding the fact that something or other is daily bringing it to our mind, and furnishing us with a timely admonition.

The Ritual of the Roman Church, at the inauguration of bishops, appoints these words to be said to the newly consecrated prelate: "Annos æternos in mente habe;" "Have in thy mind the eternal years." When the Pope, newly elected, is conducted in solemn ceremony to St. Peter's Church, he who precedes him in the procession, shakes in his hand a little burning flax, repeating thrice these words: "Pater sancte, sic transit gloria mundi." "Holy Father, thus passeth away the glory of the world." How salutary and pious a prac-

tice it would be for us, daily at the commencement and termination of our actions, to repeat to ourselves these words: *Think on Eternity! Ponder in thy mind "the eternal years."* But more especially when we are in the immediate occasion of sin,—when the devil is assaulting us with evil suggestions, and when there is danger of offending against our consciences, should we exclaim: *Think on Eternity! Turn over in thy mind the "eternal years!"*

CHAPTER I.

DIVERS ADMONITIONS TO INDUCE US TO REFLECT UPON ETERNITY.

Philip, King of Macedon, appointed a young nobleman to say to him thrice every morning, "Philippe, homo es:" "Philip, thou art a man;" that being ever mindful of his mortality, he might conduct himself cautiously and prudently in his dealings with his fellow men. Much more, in my opinion, ought every good Christian and true member of the Catholic Church, to be a daily monitor to himself and to say to

himself deliberately, at least thrice in the day, *Eternity! Eternity! Eternity!* And why? Because, as the Prophet Isaias said to King Ezechias, "Take order with thy house, for thou shalt die and not live;"* there will come an evening which will be followed by no morning, or there will be a morning that will know no evening. Take special care in thy daily transactions, so as not to wound thy conscience; and trust not too much to the goods that perish, lest thou perish with them, and forfeit everlasting treasures.

It is a custom in Germany, and highly praiseworthy, that when a candle is lighted and brought into a room, to give expression to this Christian sentiment: "May God grant us eternal light." In the Church a lamp is always kept burning before the Blessed Sacrament, to put us in mind that the "light of the Gentiles," the author of light, is there present. And why are these customs adopted, save to direct our thoughts to eternity?

There is a certain infamous and horrible kind of eternity, conceivable in dungeons. To be condemned to the galleys, to be sentenced to perpetual imprisonment, is in the

* Isaiah xxxviii. 1.

judgment of many, a far more grievous punishment than death.

They who are depressed by sickness or sorrow, fancy to themselves a certain kind of eternity in their afflictions. Hence we often hear them exclaim: "Will this continue for ever? Shall I be confined to my bed for the rest of my life? Shall I be bedridden? Is it possible to endure these perpetual pains? Shall I be always thus miserably teased and tormented?" Be persuaded that these eternities are very short ones, and that each one of them has its proper termination.

But to return to the perpetual prisons, into which many of their own free choice enter, and there cheerfully spend their lives, the religious men and women, who, for the sake of God, find it not difficult to bid an eternal adieu to the world, and confine themselves to their sacred enclosures. There is a monastery in Bavaria called Altmunster, founded by St. Alto, and divided into two distinct convents, one for men and one for women; which double monastery, like the one at Constantinople, before mentioned, resounds almost day and night with the praises of God. In this Abbey, when a virgin receives at her pro-

fession the sacred veil, and is united to Christ her spouse, and when the solemn service is concluded in the Church, it is customary to conduct her through the sacristy into the monastery, four nuns walking in procession before her, and carrying in pious ceremony a coffin. All the professed nuns having entered, the doors are shut and bolted, and the new spouse of Christ is addressed in the following manner: "See, holy virgin, that you rightly continue to be that which you now are. Reflect that from this enclosure, which you have now entered alive, you must not depart except when dead, and a corpse. The world, and whatever belongs to the world, must be abandoned by you, must be banished from your thoughts. Christ must be to you all in all. Behold by this gate you have entered into the house of obedience; nor can you depart from it except in this coffin now before you, when you will perform your last journey to the sepulchre, upon the shoulders of your sisters. The way to heaven is always open for you, and you are always at liberty to explore it, and to travel upon it; but there is no return to the world, to your native land, to your paternal home; for we now bury you alive,

and you yourself are going to your obsequies." This to many spectators appears a sad and mournful spectacle. Alas! say they, to be shut up for ever in this cell; to grow old on one spot, without ever moving from it; to be prohibited from ever returning to our parents; to waste away life without tasting any of its pleasures; to be thus buried before our death; alas! who is not filled with horror? Both men and women step forward to embrace this secluded life; but we do not follow them. Tell me, however, ye children of the world, what are the questions put to you by the Prophet Isaiah? "The sinners in Sion are afraid, trembling hath seized upon the hypocrites. Which of you can dwell with devouring fire? Which of you can abide in everlasting burnings?"* That appears to you intolerable, which, in a few years, leads to a holy death, to the secure possession of heaven, to the reward of a blessed eternity, and to the perpetual enjoyment and sight of God. Yea, they who live piously and chastely have more real happiness, than they who fare sumptuously every day, and abound in riches. Tell me, likewise, would not a coffin be esteemed by the reprobate, were

* Isaiah, xxxiii. 14.

it to signify, that after burning at the stake and enduring the excruciating pangs of fire, during some hundreds of years, they would at last be carried in it to their quiet grave? Oh! how desirable, how light would be this sentence! But "they look for death, and it cometh not."* They wait for it a thousand upon a thousand years, and it cometh not. Still they expect it, although they are aware that their expectations are fruitless. You who love both heaven and yourselves, fix your minds, ere it be too late, upon "*the eternal years.*"

Rufinus† of Aquileia, relates something similar to that which we have mentioned in the above monastery. "In Thebaida," he says, "the monastery of St. Isidore is as large as report makes it. It is surrounded by very spacious walls, and well supplied with gardens, fountains, and all things necessary for life; so that there is no occasion whatever for any one to leave the enclosure, even on business. For it is an inviolable rule of this monastery, that when any one has entered within its precincts, to inform him that he must not leave it; and that the only way left open for him is the one which conducts to heaven, and his

* Job, iii. 21. † Lib. ii c. 17.

grave. Nor is it wonderful," he continues, "that the happiness even of this life, independently of the rule, should keep the members faithful to its observance. For all their employment is to pray and praise God, and diligently pursue their studies. All these pursuits they prosecute with great industry and sanctity of life, so that many amongst them became renowned for the gift of miracles. They observe so much temperance, and enjoy so singular a privilege of life, that no one is ever indisposed, except by his last sickness, that is, we may say, by death, which unlocks the gates of every cloister, and from whose intrusion no bars and bolts can secure us. And does not this monastery furnish you with some shadow or representation of eternity? But let us proceed.

CHAPTER II.

ETERNITY EXCEEDS ALL THE CALCULATIONS OF ARITHMETICIANS.

There is a very common and well-known sum, usually proposed to chil-

dren at school, about the duration of Eternity. It is this: Suppose there was a mountain as large as the whole earth, or even greater, of very fine sand; then suppose an angel were to take away one grain, and one grain only of this sand, every year,—how many millions of years, now many hundreds of millions, how many millions of millions of years would it require to diminish, in any perceptible degree, this vast mountain. Let him who is skilful in figures sit down and calculate, if it be possible, how many years it would occupy to remove the whole, or even half of this mountain, by the angel, in the slow manner above mentioned? We do not readily conceive how there would be any end to such a calculation. But in this our imagination is deceived, for the very last grain of this mountain can be counted. It is certain, however, that Eternity exceeds all measurement, because there is no proportion, no kind of comparison between things finite and infinite. For Eternity has no line of boundary, no termination. Therefore, when the damned have burnt in the raging flames of their miserable dungeon, during all that long space of time,—during that almost incredible num-

ber of years which it would employ the angel to remove the mountain of sand, grain by grain, then will they be compelled to exclaim, Here begins Eternity! Nothing of it hath yet passed away! It is still entire—untouched! After the removal of such another mountain, Eternity will remain the same without end, without a middle, without a beginning; for the measure of Eternity is *Semper*, *Always!*

The same arithmetical calculation, a recent divine gives us in the following words, which I willingly transcribe, because we can never either think or speak sufficiently of the measurement of Eternity.* Behold the length of Eternity! How long will God and His saints reign? How long will the reprobate burn in hell? For ever! But how long is for ever? Fancy a hundred thousand years,—what is this to Eternity? Imagine ten hundred millions of years, or rather ages —what even is this compared to Eternity? Proceed in the expansion of thy mind, and conceive a million of millions of years. Eternity is still entire. Thou hast taken nothing from it. Stretch thy imagination further still, and take the cube

* Cornel. a Lapide, in c. 15. Exod. 18.

of this sum; or suppose it stated thus: 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000, which would be something like the following:—hundreds, thousands, millions, billions, trillions, quadrillions, quintillions, sextillions, septillions, up to one octillion. Turn over in thy mind this number of years spent in the flames of hell, and then reflect that thou hast not yet reached the commencement of Eternity! Multiply this octillion of years by itself, and what will be the product, with reference to Eternity, but as a few drops of water to the ocean. Thou wilt be still far off from the beginning of Eternity. For never ending happiness still awaits the just, and never ending torments afflict the wicked! O Jesus, spare me! O Jesus, Jesus, save me! Have mercy on me, O good Jesus, and do not cast me headlong into the eternal gulf of reprobation!

If God should say to the damned, Let the whole globe be covered with fine sand, and let it be piled up, even to the sky; then let an angel come every thousand years, and take away with him one grain of this sand, and when, after so many countless myriads of years, he will have removed the whole bed of this sand. deep

as is the distance from the earth to the firmament, I will deliver you from hell, Oh, how happy would they be! How would they exult! They would deem themselves no longer to be in a state of reprobation! But, after all these years beyond the terms of our finite calculation, others, and as many remain, and this, ad infinitum, for ever! for ever! This is the weight that oppresses the damned! Consider, O sinner, that this same weight is about to fall upon thee, unless thou repent!

William Peraldus, Bishop of Lyons,* a very religious and learned author, hath another method of reckoning up, and meditating upon, the years assigned for the punishment of the damned. If, he says, these lost souls should shed but one tear every day, and these tears should be collected together, they would at length exceed the drops of water in the immense ocean. For all these drops have their number and their measure; and it is a very easy matter for God to say, So many are the drops in the sea, the wide and almost boundless sea, and no more. But the tears of the damned exceed all number,

* Tom. i. Summæ Vit. part 7. de 8 beat.

all measure! Oh, how little do we think of these things, when we sin so freely, and render ourselves guilty of everlasting punishment, and this very frequently for a brief and filthy pleasure!

There still remains one way more of taking a glance at the countless number of years the damned will have to suffer. Suppose a strip of parchment about three inches broad, and sufficiently long to encircle the globe, that is, nearly 25,000 miles in length; then suppose the figure 9 to be written very closely over the whole length and breadth of this band or fillet, where is the man so skilful in arithmetic as to be able to cast up this sum, and to tell us the product? Where is there a mountain so large as to contain particles of dust as numerous as the figures on the above parchment? Where is there an ocean so immense as to hold drops of water equal in quantity to the supposed product? Yet this is not Eternity. No, it stretches further still. It cannot be circumscribed. It is both longer and broader than anything we have mentioned. How much? In infinitum. Infinitely beyond any terms we can employ for this purpose. If thy heart, dear Christian brother, has not

become hard as adamant, it is impossible for thee to reflect upon this Eternity of hell's torments, and not stand in dread of them. It will be evident from thy conduct in this matter, whether thou hast still command of thy reason. For, as we have already repeated, few think of these awful truths; and hence they live on, as secure of their salvation as if there was no Heaven, no God, no Hell, no Eternity! No day of their lives passes by without the perpetration of fresh crimes, as if their sole labour was to commit sin, so that, at the termination of life, their consciences are burdened with an immense weight of iniquity. In this state they enter Eternity, in the midst of their sports and pastimes, as if they were going to prison for a few days only. These deluded creatures, says St. Gregory, instead of mourning over their grievous offences, are dancing for their amusement, and, instead of meditating upon death, are playing the reveller on their way to execution. What fearful blindness! What astounding insanity! For the breath of a moment, for the shadow of Eternity, we labour above our strength; but for the enjoyment of a really happy life during endless ages, we labour, I will

not say above, but not even according to our poor strength. Yet not to obtain this life of happiness is to incur everlasting death. And what torment in the world is so grievous as this? And this will be an additional aggravation, that there will be no cessation, no mitigation of its excruciating pains, no, not even for one short hour, during the endless round of Eternity!

CHAPTER III.

THE EFFECTS OF THIS CONSIDERATION OF ETERNITY.

How many Christians, how many holy martyrs, has not the meditation of Eternity inspired to suffer the greatest torments, and the most poignant pangs of death; yea, whilst writhing in their agony, and welter-ing in their blood, to be cheerful and courageous, and, with a smiling and undaunted countenance, to taunt their executioners with the want of fortitude? Truly had they in their minds "the eternal years.

The same meditation has conducted thousands of men, and some even of the very worst character, into the desert, into monasteries, and religious houses, that they might repair the evils committed by a soft and effeminate life by one of severe discipline and austerity. They had in their minds "*the eternal years.*" Many religious persons may be mentioned who began from this one thought of Eternity to despise the world, and to be displeased with its vanities. Such was St. Teresa, the foundress of a new religious order in Spain.

This reflection of Eternity makes all things easy and even pleasant to those religious persons who embrace a severe institute. It persuades them that their longest labour is short, that their greatest toil is easy. It recommends to them prayer, study, and watching; and it creates in the mind an attachment to these duties, and renders them pleasant. It seasons and sweetens hunger and thirst, and alleviates the many evils of absolute poverty. It makes hair shirts, long applications to study, sharp disciplines, and every other species of mortification, not only endurable, but even desirable. Whoever has in his mind "*the eternal years,*" and impresses

them by daily meditation indelibly upon his memory, will shrink from no labour, will be daunted by no dangers, will be checked in his undertakings by no difficulties. Offer to such one a kingdom, present to him the greatest delights the earth can yield to his enjoyment, and he will despise them, and will prefer his own poor, very poor and humble condition of life. Happy Christian! he never complains either of the wickedness of men, or of his untoward circumstances! He bears all things with true resignation, and calmly submits to the various trials of his peculiar situation! For these are the reflections of his serene mind: What a mere trifle is this or that, and how brief its existence? I will patiently, therefore, endure it, for it will not last for ever! A short hour is that in which my enemies afflict me. Proceed, then, ye detractors, and rob me of my reputation: lacerate my feelings more and more, ye sons of envy; I will not withdraw myself from your assaults. This is your hour, and the hour of the power of darkness. I am awaiting for the day of the Lord, the day of Eternity. Why, then, should I give myself up to lamentation or sorrow? The whole of this life may be termed the death of one

brief hour; whilst the combat is not difficult, and the triumph is eternal. Why should I be afraid of the angry billows of this stormy sea? Do I not already see the port? Now showers and hail storms descend upon the heads of the just, but this will not be so for ever, except upon the enemies of God. Fire and brimstone shall indeed be their portion for endless ages. "And many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth, shall awake; some unto life everlasting, and others unto reproach to see it always."*

In the ancient Law God commanded Moses, saying:† "Make thee two trumpets of beaten silver, wherewith thou mayst call together the multitude, when the camp is removed. If thou sound but once, the princes and the heads of the multitude of Israel shall come to thee. But if the sound of the trumpets be longer, and with interruptions, they that are on the east side shall first go forward." To these two trumpets may be compared these two words: *Now* and *Always*. The Law of the world is this: "Come and let us enjoy the good things that are present, and let us speedily use the creatures as in youth. Let

* Dan. xii. 2. † Numb. x. 2. 4.

us fill ourselves with costly wines and ointments; and let not the flower of the time pass by. Let us crown ourselves with roses ere they wither; let no meadow escape our riot. Let none of us go without his part in luxury; let us everywhere leave tokens of joy; for this is our portion, and this our lot."* They who attend to this sound only, who have ears only for this trumpet *Now*, live as if the more important one of *Always* would never follow. They do not, therefore, move their camp; they forget, amidst their pleasures, that they are strangers and pilgrims; and they move only when and where the flesh invites them to sensuality. Then are they all obedience. They are wholly engaged either in amassing riches or devising pleasures. Consequently the clangour of the trumpet *Now* doth so stun their ears, as to render them deaf to the good admonition of the trumpet *Always*. But they who listen to both these trumpets, as the Church for these eighteen hundred years has daily sounded them, and allow the import of these sounds to reach their souls, and compare the short *Now* with the never ending *Always*, are not long in deliberating, but strike their camps immediate-

* Wisd. ii. 6, &c

ly, and live as pilgrims, and gird up their loins, and remember that they are on their journey, and send before them into heaven all their treasure, and prefer the enjoyment of the interminable *Always* in the city of God—their native country—to the brief *Now* in this valley of tears, this region of the shadow of death.

Certain it is, that he who listens with attention to the sounds both shrill and prolonged of these two trumpets, and compares the present with the future, temporal with eternal possessions, will immediately prepare himself for his departure, will dig his grave, unfold his winding sheet, place himself upon his bier, will arrange everything for his last journey through the gate of death into Eternity, and will thus daily and most seriously commune with himself: "Am I able to render an account to God of all my thoughts, words, and actions? When shall I be required to give in this account? What sentence will be pronounced upon me? Therefore I will die to myself now, that I may live to myself and to God for ever hereafter. Well, indeed, is it for the man who thus daily and deliberately reflects upon Eternity! Whatever we may be doing we may be quite sure of this, that

we are travelling towards the regions of Eternity, and that perhaps, far sooner than we are aware of, we shall arrive at its portals, and gaze upon its immensity. At the termination of our earthly pilgrimage death will land us before this gate, and open it for our admittance. They who are about to die often teach us important lessons both by words and actions.

The 21st of March, 1606, died Justus Lipsius, a man of wonderful erudition, and very eminent for his writings. Whilst he still possessed a free and intrepid mind, he would often with Augustus desire to die a natural and easy death. He obtained both his wishes. During the few last days of his life he abstained from all writing and study. When in his sufferings he was desired to remember the courage of the stoics which he had celebrated in his works, he replied, "That is vain;" then pointing with his finger to a crucifix, he exclaimed: "This is true patience;" immediately adding, with a deep expression of fervour, "Give me, dear Jesus, true Christian patience." When his disease grew worse, his first care was to purify, strengthen, and animate his soul by the Sacraments of Penance, Holy Eucharist, and Extreme Unc-

tion. Having earnestly requested the prayers of the pious, with eyes and hands uplifted to Heaven, he poured forth this fervent prayer: "O Mother of God, cheer, by thy presence, me thy servant, now contending with Eternity, and do not abandon me in this hour, on which depends my eternal salvation."

Here, dear Christian, you behold the noble example of a good Catholic. We, in like manner, ought daily to supplicate Christ and His Virgin Mother, our Patroness, and to say oftentimes in a day, with a glowing heart: "O Christ Jesus! O Mother of God! defend me, thy servant, about to struggle with Eternity; and do not abandon me in that hour, on which depends the everlasting salvation of my soul."

CONSIDERATION V.

HOW OTHERS, EVEN THE WICKED, HAVE MEDITATED UPON ETERNITY.

"Good master, what good shall I do, that I may have everlasting life?"—MATT. xix. 16.

"It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."—MARK, x. 25.

The love of Riches and the love of Eternity cannot dwell in the same heart.

CONSIDERATION V.

HOW OTHERS, EVEN THE WICKED, HAVE MEDITATED UPON ETERNITY.

An ancient history of the Fathers relates that a certain religious meditating on the 89th Psalm, came at length to these words: "For a thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday which is past."* Here he paused, for he could not conceive the reason why a thousand years should be compared with one short day. Whilst in this revery, a little bird was sent by God, which so enchanted him with the sweetness of her song, that the very long time he listened to it seemed scarcely the duration of an hour. "The Spirit breatheth where he will."† Not only have many virtuous persons with holy David meditated upon Eternity, but even the wicked, sometimes contrary to their wishes.

Benedict Renatus‡ relates that a vain

* v. 4. † John iii. 8.

‡ Lib. 5. Magni. Ordin. Christian.

and ungodly fellow, wholly immersed in the pleasures of the world, who neither fasted nor watched, and who could not above all things endure to be deprived of his sleep, one night, however, could not take his rest as usual. Strange dreams kept him awake; he turned from side to side, yet could not invite slumber to his eyelids. He earnestly longed for daylight. Whilst in this restless mood the Spirit of the Lord began to breathe, even upon this strange land. For good thoughts, which had seldom entered his mind, now during these wakeful and uneasy moments took possession of it. He began to commune with himself in the following manner: "What reward wouldst thou demand in recompense for lying on thy couch in this unpleasant manner, let us say two or three years without cessation? Furthermore, let it be in darkness, without the society of friends, with no great degree of illness, but without pastimes and without revellings;—what wouldst thou demand for this confinement to a feather bed for so long a time without conviviality and theatrical amusement? For I must be certain that I alone cannot be free from ailments and indisposition. In sickness I must be

confined to bed whether I will or not, unless I am cut off by some sudden death, which God forbid!" Behold the breathing of the Holy Spirit—the good thoughts suggested to him! "But what bed shall I have when death will have carried me out of this world? The body will putrify and decay beneath the earth. For in this respect I know that all are treated alike after death. But what will become of my soul in the future world? I firmly believe that all persons do not go to the same place. Do not some ascend, whilst others descend? Are there not the flames of Purgatory and the flames of Hell, as well as the joys of Heaven? Ah! what, pray, is the bed of the damned? How many years are they confined to it? In what year after they have commenced will the flames of their torments cease? Christ has not only threatened to cast the wicked into eternal fire, but has executed His threats. This is both manifest and certain. Will they, therefore, burn for ever in flames of fire? Will not a thousand years, multiplied say by a thousand, suffice to blot out the sins of a short life? Will these miserable culprits never see the light of the sun, never see Heaven, never enjoy God? What,

never? Alas! alas! They will be very miserable for all Eternity!" From these and such like reflections this man became so vigilant, and made so great a progress in watchfulness, that day and night the thought of the future haunted him wherever he might be. Fain would he have shaken off the troublesome stings of conscience, but he could not. Then he gave himself up to recreation, midnight potations, roisterous companions, and dances, so that in the midst of these revellings he did not hear the chidings of his conscience. But when the voice of mirth was silent, and the musical instruments slept, and the wine sparkled no longer in the cup, when all was still and dark, and the reveller alone in his chamber, the still small voice within him began its solemn admonitions, and the thoughts of Eternity flitted as formerly before the visions of his mind, and harassed him with many fearful forebodings. At last he was determined to amend his life, and devote himself to the practice of virtue. "What, miserable wretch," he said to himself, "what am I doing? I fancy that I am enjoying the world, when it is no such thing. For I endure many things sorely against my will, and I long for many

things which I cannot have. I serve it as a slave; and what is my reward? I now see the recompense of the world, by which I have been so long held in bondage. But grant that it gave me all the delights which I covet, how long will they be in my possession? I am not certain if I shall see to-morrow's sun. The funerals we witness daily are a sufficient evidence of this uncertainty. O Eternity, if thou wert not in being! O Eternity, if thou be not in Heaven thou wilt be bitter and unpleasant, even on the softest bed of down! It is, indeed, a great mortification to withdraw ourselves from those things to which we have been accustomed. It is hard to tear ourselves from the generous bowl, pleasant feasts, and jovial companions. But whilst we delay death may surprise us, and sweep away all these transient delights. Oh! why then procrastinate? Why not make a virtue of necessity? Well, henceforth I will be wholly a different person, or nothing. This life is very short; Eternity very long. Hence I must walk in a totally new path. I must change my life. Now, therefore, for courage! now for a commencement! Hail! holy perseverance, hail! I greet thee with a welcome hail!" To

conclude, he did what he promised. He became a Cistercian monk, lived a virtuous life, and died a pious and edifying death.

O eternity! how few thus seriously reflect upon thee! fewer still weigh well thy import, and persevere in their meditation! All other things are eagerly sought after, whilst thou alone are deemed worthless! We run after riches; but they are transient and perishable! We are ambitious of honours; but they are very slippery, and must shortly be resigned, for the undistinguished ashes of the tomb! We are ardent lovers of pleasure; but earthly pleasure has a bitter and unhappy termination! We desire rest; but all rest on this side of the grave is of short duration! We cement friendships; but death separates them! We are fond of conversation; but not of that which relishes of heaven! We store up abundance; but in that granary in which moths consume, and through which thieves break and steal! Oh! if we duly reflected upon eternity, says St. Bernard, the transient possessions of this life would not inflame our desires. "To him who sighs for eternal happiness, the momentary and per

ishable goods of this world will be loathsome."*

There are some persons, I know not how it is, have Eternity always on their lips, but never in their heart. They pledge themselves solemnly to renounce such and such things. We frequently hear from them promises of the following nature: "I will henceforth and for ever avoid that dangerous place, which is to me an occasion of sin. I will no longer associate with such a man or woman; for I am bound to shun wicked companions. I will no more frequent those carousals and public dances, which have been so often fatal to my virtue. But it sufficeth that I have been there once, perhaps oftener, and that I have united on these occasions with this or that individual." My good man, thou hast promised well; and because thou fearest sin, thou justly dreadest the occasion of it. Would to heaven! that thou wouldst be as faithful in keeping thy promises, as thou hast been ready to make them! Sometimes scarcely a few hours, however, or a few days have passed away, before thou dost the like actions again, actions which thou hadst so solemnly foresworn and detested. Consider,

* Epist. 3.

therefore, diligently what must be done in these circumstances, and do it valiantly. Make no rash promise to God; but that which thou hast vowed to Him, sacredly and inviolably fulfil. For we are taught by many examples how severely He punishes those who break the solemn engagements they have made to Him.

CHAPTER I.

THE TOILS OF MEN COMPARED TO THOSE OF SPIDERS.

There is another eternity, and that the very worst, which those who build themselves a heaven on earth, and who wish to be happy before their death, promise to themselves. Hence the Prophet Isaiah: "Wherefore, hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men.....For you have said: We have entered into a league with death, we have made a covenant with hell."* O foolish men! What a vain thing is this your eternity! There is nothing stable, nothing permanent in this region of darkness. How

* Ch. xxviii. 14.

elegantly and appropriately has the Royal Prophet explained this truth: "Our years shall be considered as a spider!"* He could not have expressed himself better, or in fewer words. For what, indeed, are all our years, save a constant musing and toilsome meditation? The whole time of our life is spent in foolish labours, in numerous sorrows, in a variety of vain fears, in frequent suspicions, in solicitudes beyond measure; just as the spider is employed in weaving its web. Our toils are continual; one succeeding another like the links in a chain. Our sighs and regrets are unceasing, because we are solicitous for the enjoyment of this, or the removal of that which stands in the way of our happiness. We perform a great many things; we commence great undertakings; and we know not, alas! poor creatures, that, with all this labour attended with little success, we are but weaving spiders' webs to no purpose whatever. "Our years shall be considered as a spider." The spider takes a great deal of pains in knitting together the delicate threads of its woof. It runneth up and down many, many times; performeth many journeys around the web, and then returneth to

* Psalm lix. 9.

where it commenced. It consumeth itself whilst spinning the multiplicity of threads requisite for its circular habitation; for it is from its own bowels that it skilfully weaves a very airy and exquisitely wrought tent, liable to be blown away by a gust of wind. This tent it suspends on high, fastens it to the roof or ceiling, leaves it and returns to it, in the course of construction, a thousand times, and spares not, as we have already mentioned, its own entrails in providing materials for the delicate texture of its dwelling. When it has suspended aloft this transparent and very slender canopy, and finished its great undertaking, there comes on a sudden the sweep of a besom, and the whole of this light and airy habitation falls to the ground and its labours perish! But this is not all; the poor spider is either killed in its web, or taken in its own net, crushed beneath the feet of those who sought its destruction! Silly creature, thus to weave its own winding sheet, and contrive the very snare in which it is killed! How many men, like the spider, weary themselves with many labours, that they may obtain preferment, that they may riot in pleasure, that they may garner up great treasures in the aug-

mentation of which they toil unceasingly. In these projects they put forth all their ingenuity; they often destroy their health, they hurry to and fro, waste their strength, and exert themselves until perspiration flows freely, and drop at last exhausted; just as the spider spins into its woof its own bowels. And when they have done all this, they have constructed a spider's nest to catch flies in. Moreover, they often expire in the midst of their labours. The days which they expected would be happy ones, are days of lamentation and mourning. That which they hoped would be their mansion, becomes their grave. Thus we spend our years in musing as the spider. For the most part, we may say, in musing only; for we propose to ourselves many undertakings; but put few of them in execution. Generally speaking, the things which we do not according to justice, have no stability; and that which we strive for with the greatest energy, we seldom succeed in accomplishing. Thus "your league with death shall be abolished; and your covenant with hell shall not stand."* We are all wasting away, and drawing near to death. But that which is

* Isaiah xxviii. 18.

far worse, we blindly precipitate ourselves into Eternity, whence there is no returning.

Guerricus, hearing these words from the Book of Genesis read in church: "And all the time that Adam lived came to nine hundred and thirty years, and he died..... And all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years, and he died..... And all the days of Enos were nine hundred and five years, and he died,"* conceived so strong an impression of death, and that he also was about to die, that he entered into the Order of St. Dominic, in which he died a pious death, and went securely to that happy Eternity, which has no abiding place in this world.

* Gen. v. 5, 8, and 11.

CHAPTER II.

WHICH IS THE MOST EXCELLENT OF ALL QUESTIONS?

St. Matthew* informs us that a young man came to Christ, and propounded to Him a question. We learn from St. Mark that this young man was well disposed, for he came running to our Blessed Saviour, and kneeling before Him, asked Him: "Good Master, what shall I do that I may receive everlasting life?" And Jesus answered him: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." † At Philippi, a city in Macedonia, the keeper of the prison came trembling, and kneeling at the feet of Paul and Silas, said: "Masters, what must I do that I may be saved?" ‡ This was certainly a very excellent question. A better or more profitable one could not be asked. But when is this question ever thought of in the world? Interrogations of all kinds pass quickly round, but this is seldom or never men-

* Ch. xix. 16. † Mark x. 17.

‡ Acts, xvi. 30

tioned. Most men, in these days, betray themselves by the questions which they ask, and which convict them of simplicity, curiosity, or some other latent disease of the mind. He who is very inquisitive where good wine is sold, sufficiently indicateth his inclination, and the chief object of his solicitude. Another will put such interrogations as would make a modest Christian blush to hear. This man showeth that his heart is full of filthiness; for from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. Such questions as these are asked everywhere. But when do we hear any one say to his neighbour, "Is this the road to Heaven?" Wicked men, more especially those addicted to luxury and impurity, when they have plunged into the deep mire of iniquity, and are constantly sinking deeper, never put to themselves such questions as these, "Shall I obtain, by this kind of life, eternal happiness? Is this the path to the regions of bliss?" They of all others, I repeat, who lead a soft and effeminate life, and wallow in sensual pleasures, and for the most part are free from troubles and afflictions, neglect such important interrogations. Afflictions are esteemed their

greatest evils. Provided all things go well with them at present, they care not what may happen to others, or what may happen in that Eternity, of which they now make no account. This is their daily song: "The heaven of heavens is the Lord's; but the earth He has given to the children of men." They want strength, neither of mind nor body, to escape from the hands of their fellow creatures. But they will infallibly fall into the hands of the Supreme Judge, and pay the eternal penalty due to their wickedness. If God in His inscrutable judgments, sometimes casteth off the wicked, and delivereth them up to reprobation, and then alloweth them to riot in their sensuality, and enjoy all kinds of prosperity and earthly happiness, believe me, the reason is this, that these miserable sinners may not be punished twice, here and hereafter; but if they have done any good works in this world, they may receive their reward in this world, before they depart to that land where darkness and everlasting horror dwell. Of such fortunate sinners the Royal Prophet makes this mention: "They are not in the labour of men; neither shall they be

scourged like other men."* "And they went aside after their own inventions."† This is the most miserable state of life we can image; because him whom God has destined for eternal life, He will not spare, but will frequently chastise.‡ Innumerable examples might be adduced in confirmation of this truth. Let the following one suffice. The like of it hath not been seen, nor heard for many ages.

CHAPTER III.

HOW GOD PUNISHES THOSE WHOM HE SPARES HEREAFTER. AN EXTRAORDINARY EXAMPLE.

In the year of our Lord 1185, Andronicus, Emperor of the East, was defeated in the 3rd year of his reign, and made prisoner by Isaac Angelo. Two heavy chains were cast around his neck, his feet also were bound in strong iron manacles, and then he was insulted with the most contumelious and opprobrious language. In this miserable condition he was brought into the presence of Isaac, by whom, after he had complained of the cruel and tyran-

* Psalm lxxiii. 5. † Psalm v. 39. ‡ Eccles. xxx. 1.

nical treatment he had received, he was immediately delivered up to the multitude, to be abused by them at their pleasure. And certainly to their angry and inflamed minds, it was no slight degree of satisfaction to be thus revenged upon him whom they deemed their enemy. It is easy to fancy how they would torment him. They buffeted him on the cheek, beat him on the back, plucked his beard, tore the hair from his head, and knocked out his teeth. They then exposed him to the public gaze, and made a laughing-stock of him, and held him up whilst the women struck him with their fists. After this they cut off his right hand, and in this bleeding and maimed condition, they thrust him into the same dungeon with thieves and male factors, without food or drink, or anyone to attend upon him in his helplessness. A few days afterwards they put out one of his eyes, and then clothed him in this mangled condition, with only one eye and one hand, in a short and sorry garment. Having shaved his head, and made him completely bald, they set him upon a scabby camel, with his face reversed; then, putting on his head a ludicrous crown of garlic, they made him hold the

tail of the camel for a sceptre. In this pitiable plight they conducted him leisurely through the market-place, in the manner of a triumphant procession. Here the very scum of the people, the vilest of the vile, like so many wild beasts let loose from their dens, rushed out upon him, without considering that three days previously he had been their emperor, had worn the royal diadem, had been praised, esteemed, and even worshipped by them. Without any regard to their oath of allegiance, they fell upon him unmercifully, with whatever arms they could seize; some struck him on the head with clubs; others stopped his nostrils with filth; others squeezed sponges filled with excrements, into his face, whilst others pierced his sides with darts. Some again threw stones, others dirt at him; some called him a madman, others a fool, and doter. One impudent woman, running out of the kitchen with a kettle of boiling water, poured it upon his head as he was passing by. There was no one who did not do him some mischief. At last, for their greater diversion, he was conducted into the theatre, where he was taken down from the camel, and suspended by

the heels between two pillars. Thus this poor emperor suffered a thousand indignities, which he bore with Christian and heroic fortitude. No one heard him sigh, or complain of his hard fortune. This, indeed, would have been useless in such circumstances. When he had examined his conscience, and asked pardon of God for his sins, he was heard to say nothing but these few words: "Lord have mercy on me! Lord have mercy on me!"

O Andronicus, unhappy that thou wert oppressed by this weight of affliction; but happy, thrice happy in thy patient endurance of it, for the chastisement of thy sins! The furious rabble did not cease to torment him as long as he continued alive. Having plucked off his garments, they tossed him about from hand to hand, and lacerated his flesh with their nails. One, more fiendish than the rest, ran his sword through his bowels, whilst he was still suspended between the pillars. Two others, contending which of their swords was the sharper, thrust them with all their might through his back. The agonizing emperor immediately lifted, with great difficulty, his mutilated hand to his mouth, as if to suck up, as some thought,

the warm blood which was still dripping from the recent wound, but in reality as the last convulsion of his parting breath. Thus he terminated his excruciating sufferings. A few days later he was taken down from the gibbet, and thrown, as if a beast, beneath one of the arches of the theatre, until some of the people, more humane than the rest, removed the mangled corpse. Still, he was not allowed to be buried. O Andronicus! O Emperor of the East! what mercy and grace has not God shown you, in allowing you to be grievously, indeed, tormented for a few days, that He might spare you hereafter! For a very brief time you were really miserable; but you will be happy for all Eternity! you had, no doubt, in your mind "*the eternal years*," whilst enduring so many tortures with heroic fortitude.

My authority for this narration is Nicetas Choniates, who was contemporary with Andronicus, and commends this Emperor for his firm adherence to the Catholic Faith, and fervent devotion to the great apostle, St. Paul, whose Epistles he had always in his hands reading. The Apostle was not indifferent or ungrateful to this piety of his client. For when imminent danger

tnreatened the fallen and captive Emperor, the golden image of the Apostle preserved in the church, shed abundant tears, showing, as Andronicus himself interpreted this prodigy, that he was about to suffer a cruel death.

Dear Christians, ponder in your mind "*on the eternal years ;*" and then, whatever evils may befall you, you will endure them patiently. For every thing will seem short when compared with Eternity. "For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory."*

Hence the Great St. Augustine made this earnest and feeling petition to God: "Here burn, O Lord, here cut; but spare me, O spare me hereafter!" St. Fulgentius, a very holy man, for the last seventy days before his death, often exclaimed: "Grant me patience now, O Lord; but pardon hereafter." This was his prayer and his ejaculation, until he breathed his last. Of this we may be most certain, that God here shows the least favour to those whom He has hereafter destined to reign with Him in eternal happiness.

* 2 Corinth. iv. 17.

CONSIDERATION VI.

IN WHAT MANNER THE HOLY FATHERS, THE CHURCH, AND THE SACRED SCRIPTURES TEACH US TO MEDITATE UPON ETERNITY.

"We have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in heaven."—2 CORINTH. V. 1.

"Let no one wonder at the place of my abode; for this appears to me an ample palace, when I meditate on the prison of hell, and the eternal mansions of the blessed."

CONSIDERATION VI.

IN WHAT MANNER THE HOLY FATHERS, THE CHURCH, AND THE SACRED SCRIPTURES TEACH US TO MEDITATE UPON ETERNITY.

It is a Catholic rite and custom to make supplications and processions, on certain days, in honour of God and His Saints. The devil imitates this pious practice. He has clients who make their petitions to him, and who go about doing him honour. The Royal Prophet had these votaries of the infernal spirit in his view, when he said: "The wicked walk round about."* Their mode of life is to go from feast to feast, from pleasure to pleasure, from wickedness to wickedness. This is their peculiar sphere. And when they have completed their circle of iniquity, and run the round of sensuality, they begin again, and thus renew their gyrations of wickedness, until death arrests them in mid-career.

The children of Job established a custom among themselves of inviting each other

* Psalm xi. 9.

by turn to a social banquet. Their virtuous father saw clearly that this succession of feasts from one to another, could not be long practised without sin. Therefore, "when the days of their feasting were gone about, Job sent to them, and sanctified them; and rising up early offered holocausts for every one of them. For he said: "Lest, perhaps, my sons have sinned, and have blessed (for cursed) God in their hearts."* As the wicked thus rejoice in their round of pleasures, and receive good things in this life; so does God appoint them a circle, not of delights, but of torments; and this for Eternity. This, likewise, did holy David foresee: "For thy arrows pass, O God; and the voice of Thy thunder in a wheel."†

Famine, war, pestilence, sorrow, disease, calamity, yea, every kind of adversity that happens before death, and death itself, are the arrows of the Lord, that fly over the wicked. They speedily bound from one to another. But the voice of His thunder is the voice of His wrath, which roars in the dungeon of hell, just as the wheel continues its rotatory motion, without any cessation or termination. This wheel, when once it

* Job i. 5. † Psalm lxxvi. 18.

is ignited, will, as if charged with electric fluid, burn on for ever. "A fire is en kindled in my wrath, and shall burn even to the lowest hell,"* saith the Lord. There is also another rotation which is likewise eternal. This is the transition from the extreme of cold to the extreme of heat, in perpetual exchange from the endurance of the one to the excruciation of the other. "Let them pass," says holy Job, "from the snow waters to excessive heat; and his sin even to hell."† Which truth is perhaps more forcibly expressed by our Blessed Redeemer in these words: "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."‡ That we may the more amply set forth, in all its horror, this incomprehensible rotation of Eternity, right order requireth that we show how the holy Fathers and the Church agree with the Sacred Scriptures upon this subject. They deliver to us various admonitions, to which, if we attend with serious minds, we shall not easily forget Eternity.

* Deut. xxxii. 22.

† Job xxiv. 19. ‡ Matt. xxii. 13.

CHAPTER I.

THE DOCTRINES OF THE HOLY FATHERS AND THE CHURCH UPON THE SUBJECT OF ETERNITY.

Of the holy Fathers, there are five especially whose words deserve our calm attention. These are St. Augustine, St. Chrysostom, St. Gregory, St. Bernard, and St. Laurence Justinian.

The first question which we propose, and which may perhaps appear a vain and foolish one, is this: Which of the following pains is decided to be the most easy and the most supportable—headache, toothache, inflammation of the eyes, the stone, violent cholics, or any other acute disease, which would leave the patient without sleep or comfort for three days and nights, and inflict so much torture as scarcely to allow him to breathe? Which, it is asked, would be the easier to endure, one of the above-named torments, and for the time mentioned—that is, three days and three nights—or to eat a small piece of fish fried in gall? This, we repeat, may seem an idle and ridiculous question. For how much sweeter

would it not be to devour a whole fish fried in gall, than to endure any of the above-named torments, though but for a single day? And simply because these bitter morsels of fish would of themselves neither injure health nor take away life, but merely leave in the mouth a nauseous taste. This answer is right. Yet how many thousand men choose the former, either in their words or their actions! How often are we eloquently and powerfully exhorted both in sermons and at the tribunal of penance, to look well to our eternal salvation; for everlasting torments await those who die in mortal sin? Christ has pointed out a different path from that in which you are walking, and He has led the way Himself. Return, therefore, to Him. Repent of your sins, for you have wandered long enough. It is now in your power either to enjoy the happiness of Heaven, or to incur the sentence of everlasting exclusion from the mansions of celestial bliss. God will not be wanting to those who have a good will. It is true that abstinence and fasting, confession and bodily chastisement, the restraint of our senses, and self-denial and self-conquest are in themselves bitter. A chaste and mortified life is certainly not

one of the most easy. But no matter, something must be suffered. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so to enter into his glory."*

Let not, then, a light labour terrify you. It is but for a few years, perhaps only for a few days, that we shall be required to fight valiantly, and to suffer patiently, before we enter into our eternal rest and happiness. He who conquers himself conquers all things. He who mortifies himself, and amputates with an unsparing hand his depraved affections, for the sake of Heaven, for the love of Christ and eternal bliss, is a truly Christian hero. Jesus Christ, after His Resurrection, placed before His apostles fish broiled upon coals, to teach them how much they would have to endure, that they were not to anticipate a soft and an agreeable life, but persecutions, in which they would be stoned, scourged, crucified, and flayed alive; and that this was their only way to a joyful resurrection and a glorious immortality. All things which we behold are less than nothing in comparison with everlasting happiness, which the eye of man hath not seen, nor the ear heard, nor the mind conceived.

* Luke xxiv. 26.

We often hear, but pay little attention to these important truths. The fish fried in gall is frequently placed before us in pious books and sermons, for such subjects as we have just mentioned are many times inculcated, are read, and listened to, and yet not believed, or believed to be of little moment, and forgotten amidst innumerable cares and distractions. And though conscience not unfrequently acts the preacher, and obtrudes, and enforces upon us its salutary warnings, and repeatedly inflicts its stings, yet it produces little or no effect. All measures adopted for reformation are fruitless. Few are persuaded either by the Sacred Orator or by their conscience. There are some so hardened as to speak glibly, and adduce the following as the principles of their actions. "Provided all goes well with us at present, we care not for the future, which is uncertain. We look merely to present profit, and to present pleasure. No one has ever returned from the grave; nor has any one been known to have come back from hell. Come, therefore, and let us enjoy the good things that are present." These are their daily and pleasant song. But let us listen to St. Augustine upon this subject. "Better,"

he says, "is a little bitterness in the mouth than eternal pain in the bowels." Better also is it to pay the punishment due to our sins in this world than in the world to come. Yea, it is infinitely preferable to pass sixty or seventy years in penance, in daily fasts, disciplines, and hair shirts, than to be detained a single day in the flames of hell or purgatory. But let us hear what another of the holy Fathers has written upon this matter.

St. Chrysostom* proposes a second question. If a man were to enjoy for a hundred years continuously a delightful dream, and then were to be punished the whole of the next hundred years, would he account the dream desirable? But as a dream is to a hundred years, so is this life to the future, yea, much less. As a drop of water is to the ocean, so are a thousand years measured with Eternity. He elsewhere confirms these observations.† What can be compared to Eternity? What in the contemplation of Eternity are a thousand or ten thousand years? Are they not as the least drop to the unfathomable ocean? It is in vain to

* Hom. 20. ad pop. Antioch.

† Hom. 48, in Epist. ad Hebr.

expect a termination to our punishment after this life; for the remedy of penance will be no longer available; and tears may fall sufficient to drown the world, without blotting out a single sin. Then, although the reprobate may gnash his teeth, and extrude his burning tongue, no one will moisten it with a drop of water. He will hear that which was addressed to the rich glutton. If even the whole of our life was spent in pleasure, what is it to the endless ages which will follow? In this life both good and evil things have their end. But in the world to come, punishment, the greatest of all evils, has no end—is everlasting. Here if the body be burnt and seriously injured, the soul leaves it and takes her departure; but after the resurrection the body likewise will be imperishable, and burn together with the soul, between which there will be no possible separation. Sinners will rise again incorruptible, not that they may be exalted to honours, but plunged into everlasting torments.

After St. Chrysostom let us attend to the instructions of St. Gregory. Will not, he asks, ebriety more quickly steal upon a man who drinks his wine in the cellar near

the barrel, than when sipping it quietly in his parlour? The celestial spouse thus glories in the words of Solomon: "He brought me into the cellar of wine, he set in order charity in me."* Upon these words St. Gregory makes the following observations: "What can the wine cellar more appropriately represent than the secret contemplation of Eternity? Certainly, he who allows this contemplation to penetrate to the inmost recesses of his soul, will be able to glory with the spouse, and to say, 'He set in order charity within me.' For he will observe the right order of charity, by loving God more fervently than himself, and by loving his enemies for God's sake. But such is the nature of this profound contemplation, that he who dwells upon it will presently be inebriated with the best of all desires, the amendment of his life, the longing for his celestial home, and the enjoyment of eternal happiness." The apostles, on the day of Pentecost, were charged with being drunk with wine. They were so certainly; but it was with wine from this cellar. Though St. Gregory has many very excellent sayings upon Eternity, yet the following is the shortest

* Cant. ii. 4.

and the most deserving of remembrance. "Momentaneum quod delectat; æternum quod cruciat." "That which delighteth is momentary; but that which tormenteth is eternal." How truly could I wish with holy Job: "Who will grant me that my words may be written? Who will grant me that they may be marked down in a book, with an iron pen, and in a plate of lead, or else be graven with an instrument in flint stone?" * viz., "that which delighteth is momentary; but that which tormenteth is eternal." The book in which this sentence should be written is the heart of man; the pen of iron, heroic meditation; the ink, the blood of Christ. And these words thus written in the heart should be revolved again and again, especially when pleasures flatter and enervate the mind, and impurity exciteth the passions, and luxury lulleth to rest the attention, and the body rebelleth against the spirit, and the soul groweth languid in opposing temptation, and there is evident danger of sin.

We will now appeal to the testimony of St. Bernard. In human life there are almost as many various judgments of things,

* Job. xix. 23, 24.

as there are different individual countenances. There are some so continually and grievously afflicted, that they are ready to succumb beneath the cross, and to conclude that it is too heavy for them to bear. One is weighed down by poverty, another tormented by sickness; some are in despondency through the pressure of their debts; others are annoyed by injurious treatment, and subjected to a variety of trials; so that they become pusillanimous and impatient, and desire their death; and then run to the river to drown themselves, or for a halter to hang themselves. Silly creatures! they imagine that this will put an end to their sufferings, when in reality it is but the commencement of that frightful torment which will know no end. The conduct of good Christians is very different. They are most anxious to do the will of God, and wish neither a speedy death nor a long life. If it be God's will that they should die, and die shortly, they are calmly resigned. Is it His pleasure that they should enjoy a long life? They accept of this decision with grateful hearts; they make no complaints against this lease for a longer term of years. Their will is so perfectly united to the Will of God, that they

wish whatever He wishes, and are displeased with whatever displeases Him. "Ita idem illis cum Deo et velle et nolle est." Besides these two classes of Christians, there is a third, and this the most numerous, who desire long life. There is scarcely one of them, however old he may be, who does not desire to live another year. For with them there is no satiety of life. Death always makes his advances too soon; always prematurely; always before the time they expected. Here a question has been mooted. Who may be said to live a very long time? St. Bernard, in his seventeenth sermon on the ninetieth Psalm, and this verse, "I will fill him with length of days," exclaims in admiration, "What is so long as Eternity? What is so long as that which will have no end? A good end is eternal life—a good end is that which has no end." He subjoins, "The true day is that which knoweth no evening, but which possesses eternal truth, and true Eternity; and therefore true and eternal society." Hence the solution to the solemn question we have mentioned, will be the following. They alone live a long life, in the true sense of the term, who will never die, but live for ever in the enjoyment of heaven whilst

they must be said to die a lingering death; alas! very much too slow, who are always dying, who never can be said to enjoy life as long as they are in the dungeon of hell, and yet are always living for the purpose of punishment!

Lastly, we will invite St. Laurence Justinian to explain the question which has been propounded. In the world there are many things which have their own locality, and which cannot be found, save partially, elsewhere. Of many flowers that grow in America, we in Europe have only the seed; and of many animals that exist there, we have only the skins here. In like manner, Eternity belongs so peculiarly to the next world, that we can but enjoy the seed or bud in this. And what are the seeds of Eternity? St. Laurence Justinian* says the seeds of Eternity are, *the contempt of ourselves, the gift of charity, and a relish for the works of Christ.* The contempt of our fellow creatures is the tree which spreads its branches over the whole world, and most powerfully feeds and fans the flames of hell. The contempt of ourselves is a very small seed, and quite unknown by the nomenclature of worldly science. Christ brought it down from

* Lib. de Obed. cap. 26.

Heaven. He who "emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man," humbled Himself, becoming obedient not to the stable or manger only, but unto the Mount of Calvary, "unto death, even the death of the cross," yea, unto the sepulchre, unto Limbo. "For which cause God also hath exalted him."* Behold how this seed, so small in its commencement, grows up and spreads far and wide its branches, and becomes the highest and the most stately of all trees.

The same illustrious Saint, speaking of charity, says: "According to the measure of your charity, will be the lustre of your glory, and the measure of your eternal reward. 'To whom less is forgiven, he loveth less.'† And he obtains less grace, who has a less degree of charity; and where there is less grace, there will likewise be a less portion of celestial glory. So that in proportion as you love God, will be the splendour of your everlasting reward. Love is the fulfilment of the law; but it must be pure, chaste, and divine love."

The third amongst the seeds of Eternity is a relish for the works of Christ. As it

* Philip. ii. 7, &c. † Luke vii. 47.

is a common adage in the schools of rhetoric to say: That they who relish Cicero's writings are proficients in learning; so in the school of Christianity, they who take delight in the works of Christ, are proficients in virtue. But he who does not find a pleasant flavour in the words and actions of Christ, is not affected, is not delighted, is not moved, by those things which regard the welfare of the soul, and the attainment of heavenly bliss. To eat, to drink, to walk, to ride, to joke, and to amuse himself, constitute the very climax of his happiness. He may truly say to himself: "How little, O my God, have I within me of the genuine seed of Eternity! For when I look into my interior, I readily and clearly discover to what vices I am prone, and to what my affections are carried. To lead the dance, to shine at the festive board, to spend the night over the bowl, to throw the dice and gamble, to listen to foolish and idle tales, to read obscene books, to applaud immodest songs, and to procure pleasant companions; all these and other similar diversions, are my daily delight, the chief study of my giddy mind. But to hear or read anything about Christ, or the

watchings and fasts of His saints, brings no music to my ear, and is exceedingly disagreeable. To hearken to a sermon for one short hour is tedious and painful. "This time seems far longer than any other; and therefore it must be whiled away in sleep or conversation." It is easy to pronounce sentence upon such a Christian as this, for there is certainly no "*relish for the works of Christ*" in his proceedings. But let us now hear the judgment of the Church in reference to Eternity.

So great a remembrance does the Church preserve of Eternity, that there is no psalm, prayer, or hymn in her liturgical offices, which she does not terminate with its solemn assertion: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is, and ever shall be;" that is, throughout all ages, the innumerable, incomprehensible ages of Eternity, "world without end. Amen." I pass over in silence the vestments and the sacred rites and ceremonies, not a few of which bear some indication of Eternity. But let us proceed from the rivulets to the fountain head.

CHAPTER II.

STRIKING TESTIMONIES OF ETERNITY FROM HOLY SCRIPTURE.

I will adduce three testimonies only from a prophet, an apostle, and an evangelist. How many are the daily sighs of the poor and despised amongst men? You will find everywhere those who may say; Because I am a poor miserable being, few are my friends! I am scorned and trampled under foot by almost every one. But wait a little, thy sun has not yet set. Listen to the divine promise: "God will clothe thee with the double garment of justice, and will Himself set a crown on thy head of everlasting honour."*

Some persons there are who accuse nature of having given to ravens a long life, but to man a short one. You who make this foolish complaint know that there is another life, when this vain and short one shall be terminated. Give ear to the testimony of St. Paul: "We know, if our

* Baruch v. 2.

earthly house of this habitation be dissolved, that we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in Heaven."* What loss, then, if these clay tenements fall to ruins, since we have a golden palace prepared for us, which will never become dilapidated? To the Prophet and the Apostle, let us subjoin the Evangelist, St. Matthew, from whose gospel we learn that Christ spoke these words: "If thy hand or thy foot scandalize thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee. It is better for thee to go into life maimed or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee. It is better for thee having one eye to enter into life, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire."† O fire! O Gehenna! O Eternity! To lose time to gain Eternity is not indeed a loss, but a gain! In this sense Christ made the following promise: "Every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall possess life everlasting."‡ Is it not evi-

* 2 Corinth. v. 1.

† Math. xviii. 8 9. ‡ Math. xix 29.

dent that this is a promise of everlasting happiness, since we receive in pledge of it a hundred-fold reward? And when our Divine Redeemer, according to the testimony of the same Evangelist, (xxv.) forewarns us of the day of judgment, He mentions Eternity three distinct times: "*everlasting punishment, everlasting fire, and everlasting life.*"

St. Pachomius, after many years of penance spent in the desert, devised a species of perpetuai watchfulness. During fifteen years he never allowed himself to take any sleep, either reclining against the wall or lying upon the floor of his dwelling. He sat in the midst of his cell, with nothing for his support, so that he could neither lean backwards nor forwards upon anything for relief; and thus if slumber did oppress his eyelids, it might be when he was neither stretched upon the ground nor gently reclining against the wall, but absolutely struggling not to be mastered and conquered by it. These constant vigils were to him indeed a great penance. But he endured this difficult wrestling with sleep with great firmness and equanimity of mind, through the hope of enjoying eternal rest in Heaven. To such a degree of per-

fection did the meditation of everlasting peace and quietness conduct St. Pachomius, that he esteemed it one of his chief delights to have no other bed than the bare floor of his cell.

Since, therefore, the holy Fathers, the Catholic Church, and the Sacred Scriptures, do so many ways propose to us the contemplation of Eternity, it is our duty, if we wish to reign for ever in Heaven, seriously to reflect upon this momentous subject. Hitherto, O my God, how rarely and how coldly have I thought of Eternity, notwithstanding that I am every hour drawing nearer to its portals! For the future, in a matter so truly important, I will be less thoughtless. And if through Thy infinite bounty many good things are poured into my lap, and fortune smile upon me, and the world stands well with me, in the midst of this prosperity my mind shall be occupied with Eternity. Alas! how long will these good resolutions last? Will this fine weather continue for ever? Will the sunshine of fortune always light up our path with the smiles of gladness? What, pray, will be the reward for this short bu pleasant life, for this sweet but dangerous felicity, which is to be presently followed

by Eternity? If, on the contrary, the stream of life becomes turbulent, and numerous misfortunes beset my path; if many things happen contrary to my sanguine expectations; if I am afflicted and crucified in various ways, and calamities from every side rush upon me, this shall be my only and most serious meditation: Permit these untoward events to have their course; whatever tempest may rage I will be perfectly patient. Let the billows of the ocean be lashed by the storm; let the winds of affliction howl with their bitterest blast; let the waves swell with fury and dash their briny foam against the shore; let the black clouds of sorrow and misery threaten me with the thunder of their vengeance; yea, let the world itself groan in anguish, and tremble to its foundation, yet behold me calm and recollected! The storm will not rage for ever; the Divine Mercy will hush the winds into peace, and touch the clouds into light and glory. I have always this consolation, that whatever I may be obliged to suffer on earth will not last for ever. The weight of my cross will cease to press upon me when I shall become the victim of death. Oh! the worst storms are those awful showers of fire and

brimstone in the darksome pit of hell. To be pelted by such showers as these is indeed a long, a very long torment! All temporal things are of short duration, transient, and momentary. They are but shadows or dreams, says St. Chrysostom, which flit from us and are forgotten. We are always hoping for them and expecting them, but never possess them. How forcibly did not our Redeemer impress upon the attention of His disciples the word "*Modicum*"—*a little while!* He calls all our afflictions, and even the most cruel death, "*Modicum*"—*a little.* Moreover, He terms all the labours of the Apostles, and the excruciating torments they would have to endure, "*Modicum*"—*a little.* Why, then, should not that which I suffer, however grievous it may be, appear little, though I may have to endure it for a hundred years? "For yet a little and a very little while, and he that is to come, will come, and will not delay."* In this manner, therefore, will I proceed in life, and judge one thing alone to be necessary, to do nothing contrary to my conscience, nothing contrary to God. For all things are sure and safe to him who is certain of eternal happiness.

* Heb. x. 37.

CHAPTER III.

ALL WHICH IS NOT ETERNAL MAY BE TERMED "MODICUM," A LITTLE.

It is perfectly true that whatever labour we perform, or sorrow we endure, occupies but a very little time. St. Augustine says: "This little while appears to us long, because it has not yet all passed away. When we shall see the end of it we shall speak of it as it is, '*a little while*.'" The Wise man, in order to depict with accuracy the period of human life, prolonged even to a hundred years, employs the very diminutives of his images wherewith to express his low esteem of it. His words are these: "The number of the days of men at the most are a hundred years; as a drop of water of the sea are they esteemed; and as a pebble of the sand, so are a few years compared to Eternity."*

Why, O ye old men, do you rejoice that you have lived a hundred years? What are they, save a grain of sand on the shore,

* Eccles. xviii. 8.

a drop of water in the ocean? And what is a single grain to the whole of the contents of a very high mountain of sand? Or what is a single drop to the floods of the vast, unfathomable ocean? As a hundred years are, so will five hundred or six hundred be—"a little while,"—a mere nothing O men of venerable age! yea, less than nothing in consideration with the day of Eternity! And yet, whilst in possession of this grain of sand, this drop of water, we sing a triumph! O foolish and unhappy Christians! our life is esteemed in value no more than a stone, and this not a piece of gold ore, or a precious jewel, but a stone from the sand of the sea shore! Our life is balanced with a drop of water, not sweet and delicious water, but water from the briny wave! All our days are full of sorrow and misery, and we rest in mind neither day nor night. "All his days," says Solomon,* "are full of sorrows and miseries; even in the night he doth not rest in mind." Recall to mind, is the advice of St. Augustine, all the years that have passed from Adam to the present day; look into the Holy Scriptures, it seems but yesterday since our first parent fell, and was

* Eccles. ii. 23.

cast out of Paradise. For what is time when past? Suppose you had lived from the creation of Adam to the present hour, you would be convinced that your life was not long, since it had passed away so rapidly. But what is any man's life? Add to it whatever number of years you please; fancy some extraordinary old age, yet what will it be but as the morning breeze? Where, pray, is Adam? or Cain? or the long-lived Mathusala? Where is Noah, Sem, or Heber? Where is that pattern of true obedience, Abraham? or Jacob? or Joseph? They lived, and they died! "Vixerunt, fuerunt Troes." Once they were, now they are not. This life glides away! And thus, too, passes away the glory of the world! O dew-drop! O vanity! what dost thou desire, what dost thou hope for, that can remain with thee long? Whatever thou beholdest here below has but a momentary existence, is but for "*a little while*," is but a mere point, and therefore worthless. St. Gregory the Great has justly observed, that the longest measure of our present life is but a point, since it begins and ends with a point.* "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,"

* Lib 15. mor. cap. 19.

all things shall have an end. "I have seen an end of all perfection," said the Royal Prophet; "thy commandment is exceedingly broad."* Why, then, do we count any time long? For that which is past is no more; the future has not yet come; and the present, what is it? The hour-glass is always dropping its particles of sand. The clock never ceases its click. The minutes, poised upon eagle's wings, are perpetually stealing from us the present hour, so that whatever remains of it is future. Where, then, is the time which we call long? St. Bernard often impressed upon the minds of his religious this excellent instruction of St. Jerome, (dear reader, allow me also to call your attention to it): "*No labour, no time should seem long, by which we acquire eternal happiness.*"

Although the term of this mortal life compared with Eternity be exceedingly short, yet not one of the reprobate can make any charge against God for not having granted to him a longer probation. For the damned must condemn themselves for not having lived a better life. "For among the dead, there is no accusing of life."†

* Ps. cxviii. 96. † Eccles. xli. 7.

They would have lived long enough, if they had lived piously.

Here, Christian brother, allow me to speak to you more freely and confidently, and to place the subject before you in a plainer and more effective manner. You say that you often think of heaven, and long for Eternity with ardent desires. If you assert this, I do not belive the assertion. On the contrary, I positively deny it. If I made such an assertion, in your position, I would not require you to believe me. For how happens it, good Christian brother, that both you and I should reflect so frequently on heaven, and should, as we boast we do, sigh after Eternity with fervent aspirations; and yet, in the meantime, live lukewarm and torpid lives, and be so very slow and backward to virtue—so lively and forward to evil—so prone and ready to wantonness—so fickle and querulous, so dilatory to everything but anger, and so patient of mind, save when we have anything to suffer? By every trifling annoyance, yea, even by a single word, we are oftentimes disturbed in mind and dejected; and all our patience melts away in the furnace of trial and adversity. But we are never more impatient and desperate

than when our wills are thwarted and contradicted. I might here speak of the imposthume of lust and envy, which lie deeply seated in the soul, but prudence bids me be silent. Such, then, are our characters; so bold when we should be timid, and timid when we should be men of courage; and yet we glory, that we have so frequently in our hearts fervent desires of eternal happiness, the very last thing, indeed, we should boast of. For, believe me, it is impossible to give credit to the assertion, that our souls are languishing so continually for Heaven and Eternity, whilst we make no reformation in our morals. Pardon me, dear Christian, if I repeat this is impossible. I can easily prove it.

The patriarch Jacob served his uncle Laban seven years for his daughter Rachel, "and they seemed but a few days, because of the greatness of his love."* Hearken to this, all you, who are given to murmuring. You do not serve a deceitful master such as Laban was, but God, the Creator of the world, and the most faithful observer of His promises. Moreover, you are not giving your labour for the possession of a wife, but for the whole kingdom of heaven; not

* Gen. xxix. 20.

for the beauty of a woman, but for the sight and eternal enjoyment of God; not for the blandishments of the fair sex, but for the never ending delights of celestial bliss. And yet one short day so unstrings your courage and troubles you, that your love of God and desire of heaven immediately droop and become cold and indifferent. No sooner does the storm of adversity assail you, than you break out into loud and bitter complaints, appeal to the throne of mercy, breathe the direst vengeance, nay, perhaps murmur against Providence, and spare not, in your blasphemy, God Himself. But when young pleasure smiles upon you with all his syren charms, you are for the while so enchanted, that you totally forget the divine service of God, and walk into the very labyrinth of sin which outwardly is fair and pleasing to the eye, and therein sink down into a fatal lethargy, from which nothing but death, perhaps, will be able to arouse you. Is this your boasted vigilance? Is this your heroic fortitude and love of God? Where are the seven long years spent in the service of your Divine Master? "Simon, Simon, sleepest thou? Couldst thou not

watch one hour with thy Lord ?"* Jacob being deceived by Laban, who gave him in marriage his eldest daughter Lia, who was blear eyed, served other seven years that he might obtain his beautiful and beloved Rachel. And, no doubt, these seven years, like the first, appeared but as a few days, on account of the greatness of his love. Probably when fatigued and overpowed by labour, he would glance at the beautiful Rachel, and say, "So much comeliness is worth my long and painful service, and I would not refuse for her sake seven other toilsome years." Thus the vehemency of his affection would mitigate the wearisomeness of his servitude.

Do you, O dainty soldier of Christ, understand these things, and still murmur? You are commanded to serve God from the pure motive of pleasing Him, that you may possess eternal rest; you are exhorted to patience, that you may be crowned with everlasting happiness: and do you, O faint-hearted sluggard, still murmur? Cast up, I beseech you, all the years which you have employed in God's service, and see whether you can equal the number Jacob spent in the faithful and industrious employment of

* Math. xiv. 37

Laban. Scarcely, perhaps, will you be able to recount as many days, or at least, as many months. Set down all the nights you have passed in prayer; carefully mark all the days you have devoted to pious exercises, and then examine whether you could truthfully say to God what Jacob said to his father-in-law: "Day and night I was parched with heat, and with frost, and sleep departed from my eyes. And in this manner have I served thee in thy house twenty years, fourteen for thy daughters, and six for thy flocks."* Tell me, dear Christian, have you served God for twenty years? You know what will be the recompense of your labour; neither the daughters nor the flocks of Laban, but God Himself will be your reward exceedingly great. You will be made happy both in soul and body. You will abound with innumerable delights, and these the most exquisite that can be imagined; and you will enjoy them without any diminution, without any weariness, and without any termination. You will swim in an immense ocean of the purest pleasures. Notwithstanding this glorious recompense suspended over your heads, are not your

* Gen xxxi. 40.

hands lanquid in the good work of virtues, and your feet slow in approaching the house of God? Are not your hearts swollen with envy? or are they not burning with hatred and revenge? Does not impurity breed in your minds the maggots of evil thoughts? Are you not quite inactive through laziness and impatience? Is this, then, the manner you serve God for the reward of heaven? for immortal glory? for eternal happiness? O why do you not imitate Jacob, and when you become weary of your servitude, look upon the beautiful Rachel. As often, therefore, as things turn out untowardly, and adversity holds you in its iron grasp, or prosperity lulls you into a pernicious tranquillity, or your labours become too burdensome, lift up your eyes to heaven, and in this manner solace your troubled mind: "Behold, my soul, thy Rachel, exceedingly lovely and amiable. She is all fair, and there is no spot in her. She dwells in heaven, the home of peace and everlasting felicity. Bear, then, for a little while, thy not over-great sorrows, thy not very oppressive labours. In a short time it will come to pass that thou wilt be the more happy in proportion as thou drankest deeper of sorrow and affliction. Then the

more irksome thy labour on earth, the sweeter will be thy rest in heaven. Go, therefore, and act manfully, and suffer patiently. Eternal happiness is worth all thy pains and labours."

If, dear Christian, you were from time to time thus to animate yourself, and with pure eyes frequently cast a glance at heaven; if with this heartfelt affection you would daily think of Eternity, believe me all the days of your service on earth would seem very few, "through the greatness of your love" for this eternal and consummate happiness. You would declare all toil easy, you would welcome contradictions and crosses as friends; and consider every kind of adversity to be your gain. The more attentively we reflect upon Eternity, the more piously shall we live during the term of our mortal existence, and the better shall we be prepared for that reward which cannot be taken from us.

CONSIDERATION VII.

HOW CHRISTIANS ARE ACCUSTOMED TO DEPICT ETERNITY.

"Thus said the High and Eminent that inhabiteth Eternity."—ISAIAH lvii. 15.

"Adam lost Eternity; Christ regained it. The Angels invite us to Eternity; the devils call us away from it. Consider well which you ought to follow."

CONSIDERATION VII.

HOW CHRISTIANS ARE ACCUSTOMED TO DEPICT ETERNITY.

If we pass through a dark house, we must go step by step leisurely, and guide ourselves by the walls. If the human intellect imagines that it can penetrate the mystery of Eternity, it will be very much deceived, and will find the way darksome, beset with difficulties and impassable. The journey to Eternity is, indeed, short; but when once we have passed its portals, there is no returning, there is no longer any exit. Although no one has ever formed an adequate conception of Eternity, so as to be able to describe it as it really is, yet it may be appropriately represented by certain images and similitudes, in the same manner as we delineate the shadows of objects which are not distinctly visible to the sight. Indeed, whatever we may write, whatever we may portray of Eternity, will be but a shadow, the very shadow of shadows. All

times collected into one whole, one continuous duration, would not reach to the outposts of its breadth. Its latitude extends farther than all hours, days, weeks, months and years that have ever existed; than all lustral computations, Olympiads, indictions, jubilees, centuries, Platonic years, and the protracted evolutions of the eight spheres, although all these together should be multiplied by millions or trillions, or the greatest multiplicator conceivable in the human mind. Neither can it be compared to any general but uncertain number, for instance, to the stars of heaven, to the sands on the sea shore, to the flowers of the earth, to the drops of dew or rain; because they all fall infinitely short of its countless succession of years. For the number of the ages of Eternity can neither be calculated nor expressed.

Sailors are accustomed to sound the depth of the sea by line and plummet. We should in like manner let down our humble and reverent thought into the unfathomable depth of Eternity, in order that we may sound it the better for the formation of our salvation. The following illustration will assist us much in this employment.

Christ, as a little child, almost naked, and taken from the manger, stands elevated upon the clouds, bearing upon His shoulders a small cross. Imprinted on the clouds in legible characters, is this inscription, *Eternity.* Beneath the feet of Christ, seated on the ground, is a skeleton, holding in its left hand a parchment, on which are written the following words: "*That which delights is momentary—Momentaneum quod delectat;*" and in its right hand holding up an apple. Near this skeleton there is a raven, pecking at a shell fish, upon which there is inscribed, *To-morrow, to-morrow.* From the earth issue flames of fire, upon which are written: "*That which tormenteth is eternal. Æternum quod cruciat.*" Two persons, one of each sex, as the representatives of mankind, adore on bended knees, Christ descending from the clouds. Behind these persons there is an hour glass, called a clepsydra, (which measures out time by the dripping of water,) and a book wide open. On one of the pages we read, "*They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment they go down into hell.*"* On the other, "*Unhappy man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*"†

* Job xxi. 13. † Rom. vii, 24.

Near to these representatives of the human race stand two angels, calling their attention and pointing to the divine child, and commanding them to gaze upon Him. You behold the picture; now listen to its explanation.

CHAPTER I.

CHRIST INVITING US.

Christ, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, came into the world, as we did, naked. We had lost the robe of innocency and immortality by our disobedience. Now, alas! how miserably arrayed do we not make our entrance into life! In union with us Christ washed out those stains of guilt which He did not contract. But what meaneth the cross upon the shoulders of the Divine Infant? It is the couch on which He slept until His death. Golgotha was His bed-chamber; the thorny crown His pillow, and the cross His bed. Many saints, influenced by His divine example, have willingly and cheerfully slept, during a long term of years, upon the bare ground,

and dealt out to nature with a parsimonius and reluctant hand, the little sleep they allowed it, in order that they might rise to a glorious resurrection. The Abbot Bonorius had in place of a feather-bed the bare floor, sackcloth for his sheets, and a stone for his pillow. The holy Bishop Lupus, during twenty, and St. Edmund, Archbishop of Canterbury, during thirty years, never took their rest in a bed. I pass over in silence the Nicolases, the Basils, the Uldrics, and many others, to whom it did not seem proper to seek amidst earthly comforts, the sleep of a few years. They cherished in their minds a rest very different from the slumbers of the body. Therefore, no abundance, no pleasure, which was not in Heaven could satiate or bring peace to their fervent souls. How many holy women have practised this course of austerities? St. Clare used for her pillow a block of wood. St. Hedwiges would repose upon nothing but a straw mattress. St. Bridget, after the death of her husband, wore constantly, for thirty years, a hair shirt, and slept upon no other bed but the floor.

Not to be tedious, there are many religious at the present time who sleep soundly

and pleasantly upon cut straw. They do not covet feather-beds, whilst they are sighing for eternal happiness, which they ever keep present to the mind by daily meditation. But let us return to Christ.

He sought death, even the most cruel and the most ignominious death of the cross, that He might deliver us from everlasting death. We must all die; but our death will be a short one. In the twinkling of an eye, in a moment, the soul will be set free from this prison of the body; and this is all that we usually call death. Not so, however, is it with the reprobate in hell. Their torments far exceed the severest pangs of death; not only because they are more poignant and excruciating, but because they are incomparably longer in duration, because they are eternal. To suffer in this manner is a perpetual death, is to be always dying. From this never-ending death, the Infant we behold in the clouds has set us free. Beneath is a skeleton, known by its beard to be that of our first father, Adam. Hearken, then, ye children, and ye children's children, to your first parent's plaintive address

CHAPTER II.

ADAM'S LAMENTATION.

O my children, happy would you have been had your progenitor known how to enjoy his felicity! But now you are miserable on this very account, that you are my offspring. I murdered you before I begot you. Through me were you condemned, before you were born. I wished to be God, and now I am scarcely man. You all perished in me, before you could perish by any act or deed of your own. It is doubtful whether you ought to call me father, murderer, or tyrant. Can I be either surprised, or complain that you are vicious and prone to evil from your youth? Have you not learnt to be so from me? I grieve over your disobedience, and yet I taught you to be unruly and rebellious by my disobedience to Almighty God. The angels are ashamed, and blush at your gluttony and intemperance; but, alas! these were the failings of your forefather. Your pride renders you exceedingly odious

to God. But this monster triumphed over me first, before I fell; and then reared its hateful head more boldly and unblushingly than ever. This is the inheritance which you have received from me, an accumulation of miseries. The infinitely good and great God made over to me, by the free act of His bounty, the kingdom of Heaven for my final and everlasting possession, which He passed by entail to you. But my preposterous folly overturned all these benevolent arrangements, forfeited all my own expectations, and for a mere trifle destroyed the whole of your inheritance. I valued the good graces of my helpmate, and the longing desires for an apple, which seemed fair and tempting to the eye, more than you all, more than Heaven, yea, more than God Himself. What a cursed, what an execrable morsel was that by which I deserved to taste, for millions of years, the bitter sorrows of hell! In Paradise I led a life the most desirable that can possibly be imagined. All that was pleasing and beautiful to the vision, it was lawful for me to enjoy, with the exception of one tree, which I was forbidden to touch. I was king over all living creatures. I was wise, beautiful, healthy, and robust. The abundance of

good things made my heart overflow with gladness. The sky was pure and serene, and spreading over me its bright blue and unclouded canopy, burnished by the purest beams of the sun, and without any change from the variations of the seasons, smiled its sweetest congratulations upon my nuptial happiness. The most brilliant and most lovely flowers everywhere greeted the eye; the feathered choir of the woodlands perpetually warbled in mine ear their merry songs. The gentle and refreshing breeze wafted upon its balmy wings the richest perfumes from the odoriferous plants of the virgin earth. There flowed in upon me from every side an indescribable pleasure. I sojourned far away from all care and weariness, sorrow and labour, disease and death. I was as a god upon the face of the earth. Angels congratulated me upon my felicity. The only one that envied this happiness, and was unsatisfied in its enjoyment, was myself. I broke the divine commandment and eat of the forbidden fruit; and all kinds of evils rushed like a mighty deluge upon me, and threatened me with destruction. I have been expelled from the garden of Eden; I am a wanderer from the face of God, and full of shame I

seek the darkest caves for my hiding places. Toil, and sorrow, and lamentation, and fear, and weeping, with a thousand other calamities, seize upon me, overpower me, and weigh me down through excessive fatigue to the earth. All you who are members of my family feel all this but too keenly. And worse still, death which we esteem the end of all human affliction, is not unfrequently the very commencement of everlasting misery! Oh, my children, learn from me, as well as from your own experience and misfortune; learn, O learn to hate sin! Lo! close by me bursts forth a flame, which began to burn the moment sin was perpetrated, and which will never be extinguished. In comparison with this fire, all other punishments must be esteemed very light, and will shortly come to an end. But this flame will scorch the reprobate for ever and ever. We may, if we heartily wish, escape its excruciating pains. The gates of heaven have been shut against me and my children for more than four thousand years. They are now opened by Him who nailed to the tree of the cross, that sentence of guilt, which I had contracted by eating of fruit from the forbidden tree; and the same He has taken out of the way

by most generously discharging our debts. Our lost inheritance has been restored to us at the price of His infinitely precious blood. Heaven, therefore, now stands open for our admittance, provided we journey to it by the way of penance. No one but he who travelleth in the royal way of the cross is allowed to enter its twelve gates, and is certain to receive a mansion not built with hands, but eternal in the celestial Sion. Once we are admitted, there is no exclusion. There no one endures conflict or injury. O my children, meditate upon Eternity, for in a short time you will be summoned into the realms of immortality, either to burn with the reprobate in hell, or to reign with the saints in heaven. This, with its admonitions, was the lamentation of Adam to his posterity:

> "Who falling once, did make his children all
> Guilty of his punishment and his fall."

When Sir Thomas Moore was cast into prison for refusing to take the oath of supremacy to Henry VIII., his wife was allowed to visit him. At her first entrance to his chamber, like a plain good woman, and somewhat worldly too, she thus bluntly saluted him: "Why Mr. Moore, I marvel

much that you, who have hitherto been taken for a wise man, will now so play the fool, as to lie here in this close filthy prison, and be content to be shut up with mice and rats, (and here she turned up her nose), when you might be abroad at your liberty, with the favour and good will both of the king and the council, if you would but do all that the bishops and best learned men of this realm have done." She then enlarged upon his right fair house at Chelsea, his library, books, gallery, garden, and orchard, and the being merry in company with me, your good wife, your children, and household; and raising her voice at the conclusion, she thus added: "Yea, in God's name, I muse what you mean by still fondly tarrying here!" Moore bore it all in his usual kindly and playful way, contriving always to blend religious feelings with his quaintness and humour. "Why, good Alice," said he, with that winning smile of his, which nothing could repress, "tell me one thing." "And pray what is that?" said she. "Is not this house as near heaven as mine own?" She answered him in her customary exclamation of contempt; "Oh, tilly vally, tilly vally!" He treated her harsh language as

a wholesome exercise for his patience, and replied with equal mildness, though with more gravity, "How, sayest thou, Alice? Is it not so, indeed?" "Bone Deus man!" was Alice's hasty reply; "will this gear (matter) be never given over?" "Nay, then, Alice," continued Moore, "if it be so, I see no great cause why I should joy in my fair house, or in anything belonging thereunto, when, if I should have been buried in my grave but seven years, and rise and come hither again, I should not fail to find some therein who would bid me get out of doors, and tell me plainly it were none of mine. What cause, then, have I to like such a house, as would so soon forget its master?" Alice was a testy soul, but she did not want feeling, and these allusions had the effect of subduing her spirits. Moore perceived the effect of his words, and patting her on the cheek, "Now, good mistress Alice," said he, "do tell me how long you think one might live to enjoy this house of ours?" "Perhaps some twenty years." "Well, now, my good Alice, if you had said some thousand, nay, some hundred years, even, it had been somewhat; and yet he were a bad calculator that would risk the losing of an Eter-

nity for some hundred or thousand years. But what, if we are not sure of enjoying our possessions a single day?" In this manner did he strengthen his mind to the endurance of a glorious martyrdom.*

CHAPTER III.

THE RAVENS CROAKING.

Near to the skeleton of our first parent, Adam, is depicted a raven, which adds a new feature to our representation of Eternity. The following is the well-known saying of St. Augustine: "*To-morrow, to-morrow, is the raven's warning. Mourn, therefore, as the dove, and beat thy breast.*" The principal reason why many Christians forfeit heaven is this imprudent resolution; they will seek and labour for it to-morrow, when they ought to wish and strive for it to-day. Nothing receives from us a more hearty concurrence than the delay of our repentance till to-morrow—till that to-morrow which we shall never see. We are

* S. Thos. Staplet. in vita illius, c. 16. And Walter's Life of Sir Thom. Moore, p. 256.

confirmed in this folly by many specious promises.

"I will to-morrow, that I will,
I will be sure to do it;
To-morrow comes, to-morrow goes
And still thou hast not done it.
Repentance thus is long deferred,
From one day to another,
Until the day of death will come,
And judgment be the other."*

The to-morrow we have in view is thus so long delayed, that life vanishes away before we catch a glimpse of its rising morn. Our doom is sealed in the gulf of everlasting despair, ere the day we promised ourselves for repentance dawns upon the world. This happens to many, says St. Augustine, whilst they are exclaiming, "To-morrow! to-morrow!" the gate of death is closed upon them for ever. The same truth had been set forth by the Wise man in these words: "Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day. For his wrath shall come on a sudden, and in the time of vengeance he will destroy thee."† Seneca, the philosopher, very

* "Cras hoc fiet, idem: cras fiet, quid, quasi magnum.
Nempe diem, donas? sed cum lux altera venit,
Jam cras hesternum consumpsimus. Ecce aliud cras
Egerit hos annos, et semper paulum erit ultra."—
Persius Sat. 5.

† Ecclus. v. 8, 9

justly observed: "A great part of our life is spent in doing evil; the greatest part in doing nothing; and the whole of it in doing everything but that which we should do." In the same manner as Archimedes, who, when Syracuse was being pillaged, sat serenely at home drawing circles in the sand upon the floor. Many Christians likewise, when their salvation is at stake, play with the dust on the floor, by their useless law-suits, their anxious money transactions, and thus devote themselves wholly to unprofitable labours. They never reflect upon Eternity, or at least very rarely and cursorily, and very little at a time, as dogs are said to drink of the waters of the Nile. "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is necessary;" and this is happiness, not the fading, momentary happiness of the world, but the eternal happiness of Heaven.

Before we undertake any employment we generally apply this well-known rule, and ask ourselves if it will be profitable, if it will procure for us a livelihood. Should not a Christian in the same prudent manner ask himself at the commencement of his exercises, Will this business I am about tend to the purchasing of heaven? Will it

bring me to eternal happiness? Thoughtless creatures! for the most part, we think little about such questions as these. We defer, we put off from time to time their consideration, and we never should dwell upon them did not death serve upon us his summons; then we begin to ask the purport of our labours, when we can labour no longer. This is the case, observes St. Augustine, with all sinners. They all say: "I will sometime, but not now." If, however, at any time, why not now?

Dionysius, king of Sicily, when stealing the golden mantle of Apollo, said: "This garment is suitable neither for summer nor winter. For in the heat of summer it is too oppressive, and too thin and chilly for the cold of winter." Many Christians, says St. Ambrose, sport with God and their souls in a similar manner. The young, say they, should enjoy the world. They must be allowed to join the festive board and the exhilarating dance, and to exercise themselves in feats of horsemanship and gymnastic games. Let them also associate with their companions in the sports of the field. We will leave the hermitage and the church for the enjoyment of poor peasants and sullen old men. When frigid

and sickly old age shall have stolen upon those who are now young, then these diversions must be laid aside, as unbecoming and above their strength. Then they must resign themselves to rest, and take care of their health. This will be all they will be required to do, and it will be quite sufficient. Thus the summer and the winter of our lives pass away, and we never reflect upon the eternal spring which awaits the just in Heaven. "In doing good, therefore, let us not fail. For in due time we shall reap, not failing."* Let our song be no longer that of the raven: "*To-morrow! to-morrow!*" and thus allow *to-day* and to-morrow, and the whole of our life, yea, and a happy Eternity, too, to slip away from us! To-day is ours, but not to-morrow. "Behold, now you that say: To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and there we will spend a year, and will traffic, and make our gain. Whereas you know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is a vapour, which appeareth for a little while, and afterwards shall vanish away."† Guido of Bourges relates that Messodamus gave this just reply to a friend, who invited him to

* Gal. vi. 9. † James iv. 13.

a feast on the following day: "My friend, do you invite me to dine with you to-morrow? How many years have passed away and I have not yet dared to promise myself to-morrow, because I have been in expectation of death every day, every hour." No one can be well prepared for death, unless he who is always prepared. Oh! how exceedingly rash is he, how openly he despises Eternity, who lies down upon his pillow, and buries himself in a feather-bed, and sleeps away the night in mortal sin! How great is the blindness and the temerity of the human mind! We are living witnesses of the frequency of sudden and unprovided deaths; we have beheld men strong in constitution and sound in health retire to repose at night, and in the morning found cold in death! Perhaps, for God alone knows, they were hurried from the feathers into the flames! We have, moreover, seen individuals seized by some mysterious disease, fall suddenly ill and die, so that within the space of a single hour they were well and sick, alive and dead! And yet we procrastinate from day to day, and worse still, we delay from year to year the amendment of our lives. In the meantime

death visits us unexpectedly, and ushers us into the regions of Eternity.

St. Augustine manfully struggled against this dilatoriness of purpose, which he experienced so forcibly at the commencement of his conversion, and he thus expostulated with himself: "I felt how much I was entangled in the meshes of my evil habits, and I continually poured forth these lamentations: How long, how long shall I still cry out, *To-morrow, to-morrow?* Why not put an end to my shameful course of life this very hour? I kept repeating these truths, and wept through grief and the pangs of a contrite heart."

The great St. Antony, according to the testimony of St. Jerome, when exhorting his monks to virtue, begged them to meditate continually upon this admonition of the Apostle of the Gentiles: "*Let not the sun go down upon your anger;*"* not upon your anger alone, he said, but upon any sin whatever. Let neither the sun nor the moon be a witness, and depart a witness, of your evil deeds.†

John, Patriarch of Alexandria, had a dispute with Nicetas, the chief man of the

* Ephes. iv. 26.

† Leont. Cypror. Epis. vita. illus. c. 14.

city. It was referred to the courts of law. John stood forth, the defender of the poor. Nicetas studied to promote his own interests. For the sake of peace, the parties agreed to meet privately and see if they could not come to some adjustment without further public proceedings. A long and angry discussion took place. Both parties believing themselves in the right, neither would recede from his proposals. After many hours spent in this fruitless altercation, they departed greater enemies than before. Since no arrangement had been agreed upon, the lawsuit was permitted to take its course. Nicetas thought it a hard case to part with his money, and on his side the Patriarch was persuaded that he was right, and obliged to be the champion of God and of the poor. When, however, they had retired, the holy prelate condemned his own pertinacity, and said to himself: Although justice is in my favour, can I think to please God by this inflexible anger, this wilful obstinacy? Night rapidly approaches, and shall I permit the sun to go down upon my anger? This is impious, this is contrary to the precept of the Apostle. The good Archbishop could not rest until he had sent a deputation of his principal clergy

to deliver to Nicetas this brief and simple message: "*Sir, the sun is setting.*" These few words addressed to him so solemnly and so unexpectedly, completely changed the disposition of Nicetas, and broke down his spirit of resistance. His eyes filled with tears, he could scarcely refrain from weeping aloud. Presently he left his dwelling, and following close upon the messengers, hastened to the Archbishop, as unexpectedly as he was welcome, and immediately exclaimed: "Holy Father, henceforth I will be ruled by you in all things." After this they mutually embraced and promised to live in perpetual friendship and harmony. This peace, which could not be adjusted by a long discussion, was firmly cemented by this one expression: "*The sun is setting.*" In like manner, when any one is conscious to himself of mortal sin, let him weigh well in his mind these few words: Sinner, "*the sun is setting;*" and perhaps, thy life with it. If thou shouldest die in the night, and such deaths are neither strange nor uncommon, in which Eternity wouldst thou be found? in eternal happiness or eternal misery? Thy conscience gives thee this warning; Do without delay what thou hast to do, for "*the sun is setting.*" Take

care, then, it does not set upon thy lust or luxury, upon thy envy or thy blasphemy, upon thy detraction or injustice, no nor upon any mortal sin, whatever may be its nature. If our clothes or our face be soiled with ever so slight a stain, we immediately hasten to wipe it off. Good heavens! are we unable to bear a stain upon our garments or our person, and yet endure the foulest corruption of sin to defile and make hideous our immortal souls? and this, too, for a long, a long, long time together? O let this day, nay this hour, be the hour of expiation! The moment sin is committed, we should do penance for it, says St. Ambrose; and this not merely by wishes, but effectively, lest the master of the household mentioned in the Gospel, who planted a vineyard, should come, and seeking for fruit, and not finding any, should say to the husbandman, "*cut it down.*" This sentence once pronounced, the doom is irrevocable. Down the tree must come. From whom, therefore, it is lawful, and whilst it is lawful, let us seek a remedy for our wounded consciences. The brute beasts teach us this lesson of prudence. The stag when wounded, hastens to a certain herb, which is well known for its healing proper-

ties. The swallow when it has blinded its young ones knows how to restore their sight by the famous celandine. The dog, when sick, seeks the vomit grass. The toad, when it feels itself swollen, after fighting with the spider, crawls to the plantain, and is cured. But we, unhappy beings, are wounded almost daily, and often mortally; and yet we care not for the healing medicine. We go to our accustomed fare at table, to our merry and jocund conversation, and to our soft bed just as usual. Who ever thinks of repentance and confession?

If we listened to our guardian angels (for they are depicted in our representation of Eternity), they would admonish us never to retire to rest before we had been reconciled to God; and would point to the hour-glass of life nearly run down, and to the day of judgment close at hand. But we heedlessly go on in the way which we have chosen. Let the hour-glass tell its tale; let the formidable day of judgment make its appearance; let death do its worst; let our good angel repeat his warning; let our last end approach, we will pursue our course without thought or care, and at the termination of each day sleep sweetly in defiance of all these threatenings. O miserable man!

Canst thou sleep in such a case as this? "Potes hoc sub casu ducere somnos," Virg. 4. Æneid. Canst thou go to bed with a conscience steeped in mortal sin? Canst thou fall asleep so near a neighbour to death, and in so much danger of eternal reprobation? Thou repliest, I can: yes, I can; nor does any evil happen to me. Oh! be not too confident. That may happen to thee in one hour, which has not happened during many preceding ones. Thou art not yet passed danger. How far, pray, art thou from death, from hell, from Eternity? A single hair's breadth. The reply is just. Death and thyself are separated from each other but by a single step. There is no need of great preparation for death to lay thee low in the grave; nor is it necessary that he should exhaust all his arrows before he sends the shaft directly to thy heart. The point of a single barb is sufficient to despoil thee of life. A thick and contagious atmosphere blows over thee, or a humour descends from the head into the chest, or an important vein is stopped, or the vital warmth of the system is suddenly chilled, or the beating of the arteries is interrupted, and thou ceasest to behold the light of day. Thou art launched

into Eternity, before thou hadst the slightest suspicion of it. Such are the thousand avenues to death, not to a slow and anticipated, but to a sudden and unprovided death. For that death may be truly and lamentably termed unprovided, which has not been preceded by a good life; and the worst of all deaths is certainly an unprovided one. It is the part of prudence for every one, whatever may be his age, whether in the bloom of youth, or in the decline of life, to consider that every hour may probably be his last. How many are suddenly cut off by a fall, by poison, by the sword, by fire, or water, by the paws of lions, the tusks of wild boars, or the kicks of horses? The causes of death are a million-fold, are innumerable. As many as are, I will not say the senses, but the pores of the body; so many are the windows of death, through which he enters to summon the soul and drag her to the seat of judgment. "It is certain that thou art born," says St. Augustine; "it is just as certain that thou shalt die." And no one knows the hour of his death. "I know not," said Eliu to Job, "how long I shall continue, and whether, after awhile, my

Maker may not take me away."* In the midst of life we are in death, which we always carry about with us in our bosoms. And who is certain that he will live till evening? Death, the conqueror of men, has a thousand arts by which he can terminate our existence. Grecian and Phrygian fire, arrows and swords, spears, battle-axes, and slings, are all at his command. Nor need we seek examples in illustration of this truth from ancient times; for we have many recent instances before us. How many of our acquaintance have, on retiring to rest, slept the sleep of death, and whose bodies will rise no more, until they hear the archangel's trumpet at the last day? Death does not always send his heralds and his messengers to give us notice of his advent. Most commonly he steals upon us unawares, and assails unarmed man without any ceremony, and lays him prostrate in the dust. "Watch, therefore, for you know not the day nor the hour." There is much regret and sorrow in hell; but no true and sincere repentance; no repentance that is of any avail. We now hear the solemn warning: "Bring forth fruit worthy of penance."† "For the night cometh, when no man can

* Job xxxii. 22. † Math. iii. 8.

work."* Work, therefore, whilst it is day. The day, says Origen,† is the term of our present life, which may seem long to us, but which, compared with Eternity, is exceedingly short; and which will be quickly followed by the duration of Eternity. O Christians! you who are conscious to yourselves of mortal sin, contemplate the gate of Eternity, and think of death. It is uncertain in what place he will pay you his unwelcome visit; prepare, then, to meet him in every place, wherever he may be; and then such as the Lord shall find you when He summons you to His tribunal, so will He judge you.

* John, ix. 4. † Hom. x. in Math.

CONSIDERATION VIII.

ETERNITY IS NOT TO BE SET FORTH BY EMBLEMS ONLY; IT SHOULD CONSTITUTE THE PROFOUND MEDITATION OF CHRISTIANS.

"In all thy works, remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin."—Ecclus. vii. 40.

"To think of Eternity and not reform our manners, is to bid farewell to Heaven, and salute the darksome regions of hell."

CONSIDERATION VIII.

ETERNITY IS NOT TO BE SET FORTH BY EMBLEMS ONLY; IT SHOULD CONSTITUTE THE PROFOUND MEDITATION OF CHRISTIANS.

Order requires that, passing from the Royal Psalmist and other pious persons, whose minds were deeply imbued with the contemplation of Eternity, we should enter into our own interior, and there collecting our wandering thoughts, dwell with ourselves alone. For he, undoubtedly, is far from home, far from himself, and far from his salvation, who confines his views to the perishable things of this fleeting world, and forgets the things which are above, and which are eternal.

Lawyers teach that we should not abandon a just title to the small sum of threepence, if it be a yearly or perpetual rent. Yea, three farthings are deemed an important rent if they are to be paid for ever. In such estimation are held perpetuities, even in such very trifling matters as three

pepper-corns. Tell me, O Christian, if you are so eager in pursuing your right to the insignificant sum of three-pence, how happens it that you are so slothful, so procrastinating in the pursuance of your title to an eternal kingdom? You will make war, and commence a long law-suit against your neighbour for three-pence; and yet quietly permit others to take from you the inheritance of Heaven! Surely Heaven must be in your estimation a possession very contemptible, since you labour so little to secure it. All other things you covet, you strive for with restless ambition—with painful anxiety—with arduous toil, and much perspiration. But the treasures of Eternity which are seen through a vista afar off, you have no leisure to contemplate; or if they do sometimes pass through the mind, it is in a transient manner, without creating any longing desire for their enjoyment and possession. For it appears a wearisome occupation to fatigue the mental vision by gazing upon objects which are only seen through a glass darkly; whilst we have near at hand pleasures and possessions for our immediate enjoyment and delight. Here, if we are wise, we shall greatly won-

der at our blindness, or rather our insanity, in expecting to find certainty, especially where there is question of money, in changeable and uncertain things, and never once seek for it in the treasures of Eternity, in which there can be no doubt, no possibility of change or deception. He who lends money demands good security. This is a proverbial truth. What more common than to say, I wish to be sure in putting out my money to interest. I require a well drawn and legally stamped mortgage. I take every means in my power to prevent fraud. Nothing more unpleasant than to leave things to chance. Objects present and certain, outbalance objects uncertain, and at a distance. A bird in hand is better than ten or twenty in the bush. A wren in the cage is better than an eagle soaring in the sky. We are of the same mind as Plautus, and believe no more than we see. Are we not exceedingly foolish in seeking for certitude in things most uncertain in their nature,—that fly away the moment we fancy that we grasp them in our hands, whilst we have no anxiety to be certain of eternal life? Know then, O Christian, the security or moral certitude which Christ gives

you of possessing everlasting life, if you keep His divine precepts. "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."* He, therefore, who keeps the commandments, shall enter into eternal life. The duty prescribed is very definite; the reward for its fulfilment infallibly certain. But he who breaks one of the commandments, and defers his repentance, and is not reconciled to his offended God, the same hour he committed the transgression, exposes to the manifest danger of eternal loss all that he possesses,—the salvation both of soul and body. He is not three fingers breadth from death, and contains within himself a thousand diseases, each one sufficient to terminate his mortal existence; and yet he rashly persists in treading this beaten path to perdition, in which, if death arrest him, he will perish everlastingly! Is not this the wildest temerity, to hazard, as it were, by a single throw of the dice, which might be easily avoided,—the infinite treasures of Eternity?

If a man were to suffer the excruciating torments of hell so many years only as he has committed sins, or so many hours as

* Math. xix. 17.

he has lived, would not this punishment seem within the range of human endurance? If the fire of Gehenna were to burn during a certain number of years only, many would live perpetual enemies of God, and would never cease from the perpetration of grievous sin. For sinners are not terrified, although they know that the torments of the bottomless pit are eternal —that they are so painful, so searching in their effect—that their endurance for a single moment seems longer than a year! If all the tortures it is possible for man to suffer, were collected and concentrated upon one individual for a hundred years together, would they, think you, equal the pains of hell, during a single year, a single day, or a single hour? Thieves, murderers, parricides, and other grievous offenders, usually terminate in three or four days at the most, the punishment to which they are sentenced. Their torments are generally very painful, but they are over in a few days, and their agony extends not beyond a week. But the torments of the damned terminate not with a year, nor with a century. Oh, no! God punishes everlastingly, and is never satiated with punishing, although He wields

the sword of His justice through the whole duration of Eternity.

CHAPTER I.

ETERNITY SHUTS US OUT, NOT ONLY FROM ENJOYMENT, BUT FROM ALL HOPE OF ENJOYMENT.

In this life hope is our greatest solace in affliction, and the most energetic stimulant to the practice of our duties. Amidst all the adversities with which the Almighty is pleased to visit us, He leaves to us for our own consolation the hope of salvation. To the soul in sickness there is hope. As long as there is life, there is this bright and heavenly messenger to cheer us. But when our earthly pilgrimage is terminated, hope, the last comfort of the miserable, is entirely withdrawn from the reprobate. And when hope has departed, there remains but eternal despair. The Prophet Daniel informs us that King Nabuchodonosor "saw a watcher, and a holy one come down from heaven and say, cut down

the tree and destroy it; but leave the stump of the roots in the earth."*

The leaves and the fruit, says St. Ambrose, are to be shaken off; but the root is to be preserved. Here pleasures are to be rescinded, and punishments inflicted; but hope is not taken from us. Behold, the root is not touched; therefore, hope remains. In hell, however, both the stump and the root are totally eradicated, and there is not a single remnant of the tree left. "Behold," says the Prophet Malachy, "the day shall come kindled as a furnace, and all the proud, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall set them on fire, saith the Lord of Hosts; it shall not leave them root or branch."† "He hath destroyed me on every side," is the exclamation of Job, "and I am lost; and he hath taken away my hope, as from a tree that is plucked up."‡ "The expectation of the just is joy," says the wise man; "but the hope of the wicked shall perish."‖ Whilst, therefore, there is time, and good ground for hope, let us feel this consoling

* Daniel iv. 20.

† Malachy iv. 1. ‡ Job xix. 10 Prov x. 28.

confidence. The poet Ovid gives us in his verses this admonition:

"Omnia sunt hominum tenui pendentia filo,
Et subito casu, quæ valuere, ruunt."

All human things hang by a slender thread;
Beneath the unseen stroke the strongest bow their head.

We must put neither our hope nor our confidence in such uncertain possessions. St. Bernard points out our course in these memorable words: "Faith teacheth that great and inconceivable good things are prepared by God for His faithful servants; hope saith, these are all prepared and reserved for me; and charity exclaimeth, I will so run that I may obtain them." * "True hope," is the expression of St. Gregory, "elevateth the mind to the contemplation of Eternity; and by this means it feels not the outward crosses and troubles by which it is assailed." True hope shows us, as through a mirror, how insignificant and how short-lived are all human things. Oh! what an awful moment is that upon which hangs the whole of Eternity! The day of our death, the last agonizing hour, may be properly termed this vital moment; that jewel of infinite price, for the purchase of which the pru-

* Serm. 10 in Psalm 91.

dent merchant selleth all he hath. But few, alas! know the value of this extraordinary jewel. "About the concerns of his eternal salvation," says St. Jerome, "every man is negligent." But whence arises this negligence in a matter of such moment? Unhappy Christians! we are afflicted with weak and distorted eyes. We see very distinctly the things that are here below, but the things that are above, we seldom or never bring within the range of our view. I do not speak of such only as have attained to manhood, but of children of both sexes, that have but just left the precincts of the nursery, and that have not yet cut their wisdom teeth. They even are initiated in the elements of vice, and taught to soil their fingers with the sordidness of avarice. They soon, unfortunately, acquire an insatiable desire of accumulating riches. They quickly become proficients in the art of turning everything to profit, in filling their purses, and in putting out their money to usury. They speak fluently upon the advantages of merchandise, point out the best wines, and tell you the fashions that prevail in foreign countries. Juvenal describes them remarkably well in his 14th Satire:

"Hoc monstrant vetulæ pueris poscentibus assem,
Hoc discunt omnes ante alpha et beta puellæ ;
Inde fere scelerum caussæ."

Of avarice:

"To anxious youths their mothers give the key:
And girls are taught it as their A B C.
This root of evil planted in young minds,
In fruitful soil a rapid progress finds."

Hence our great ignorance and forgetfulness of things eternal. Both young and old esteem their wealth; but of the value of heaven and Eternity they know nothing. Let us, however, proceed.

CHAPTER II.

ETERNITY IS A SEA, A THREE-HEADED HYDRA, AND A FOUNTAIN OF JOY.

I would gladly ask Christians, who frequently listen to sermons, but without any attention, one question. Suppose you were to stand upon the sea-shore, and to attempt with a spoon to lade the water out of the sea into a small river, which immediately rolled the water back again to whence it came, how long a time, in such a supposition, would it require for you to

empty the sea? Or suppose, if it please you better, that you employed a large bucket, and emptied it into a totally distinct channel, tell me, even in this case, in how many years you would be able to drain the sea dry to its lowest bed? To burn in the raging flames of hell as many years as this operation would demand, would be, you would say, an intolerable torment. Yet the damned would most gladly make this covenant, and would not call the years many, provided there would be a concluding one, in place of the endless duration of Eternity.

The ancients fabulously depicted a hydra or dragon with three heads, and when one head was cut off two others immediately sprung up from the wound. This hydra or dragon, if anywhere, is certainly in hell, in which there is a threefold Eternity, with a threefold head: the pain of loss, the pain of sense, and the worm of conscience, which never dies. Oh! what improvident and reckless creatures we are, since we have but a short journey before us, a journey nevertheless beset with numerous difficulties, yet walk cheerfully and carelessly along, as if we were jaunting in a garden of pleasure, secure from all enemies,

and certain of reaching our heavenly country! We cannot, however, be ignorant, unless through our own wilful blindness, that we shall presently arrive at the two portals of Eternity, the one which opens upon the kingdom of the blessed, and the other upon the regions of the damned. Through one of these portals we must necessarily pass, and the one we enter will entirely depend upon the manner in which we conduct ourselves during the journey.

St. Laurence Justinian, astonished at the insane mirth of such travellers, exclaimed: "Oh! the lamentable condition of men, who, whilst they are exiles, go on rejoicing in the way of their pilgrimage, as if they were not banished from their native land!" Let us be wiser, and withhold our hearts, as really strangers and foreigners, from the vain delights of this world, and attend to one thing only, our admittance through the narrow gate into the kingdom of eternal happiness. God has created us for happiness and not for misery; but this is neither the time nor place for happiness, but for labour and probation. God has decreed the enjoyment of true felicity to be eternal, and the period of our mortal existence, the period in which we may earn the

reward of this everlasting felicity. By what service, then, you may ask, may I acquire a just title to this infinite recompense? You know the the terms proposed by the Gospel: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away."* Seriously put to yourselves this question: Am I the violent and determined character here alluded to? To linger at the festive board, to spend my time in amusement, to seek my own ease and pleasure, is this the violence required by Holy Scripture? Fight, indeed, we must, and that bravely, nobly, and without cowardice, the good fight; run we must, and that most strenuously, and at the mark set before us; wrestle we must, and that perseveringly, under that painful training, that privation of bodily comfort, which will obtain for us the mastery, and all this to the very last hour of life, to the very moment we stand upon the confines of Eternity, when we shall bid an everlasting adieu to this fleeting and perishable world, and look back with joy upon the trials which will then be happily over, and entertain the mind with rapturous anticipations

* Math. xi. 12.

of the future, in a boundless and endless Eternity. Let us, therefore, strive with all our might; let us labour and do violence to ourselves by an earnest and triumphant struggle against our evil inclinations and passions, that we may pass from the cares and toils of this short life to eternal rest, and in a few days enter the regions of everlasting glory.

True and solid joy is not to be found in the vain and momentary pleasures of earth, but in the delights of Eternity. "And the Lord God prepared an ivy, and it came over the head of Jonas, to be a shadow over his head, and to cover him, for he was fatigued; and Jonas was exceedingly glad of the ivy."* And what is all the pleasure or rather vanity of the world? Is it not an ivy creeping up the face of the wall, and spreading over the head an agreeable shade? The rich rejoice under the shadow of their great wealth. The worshippers of the carnal appetite rejoice under the shadow of a table groaning beneath a variety of luxuries. The voluptuous sit beneath the dark shadow of their degrading and obscene pleasures. But at the end of their joy there is mourning. "God prepared a worm,

* Jonas iv. 6.

when the sun arose on the following day; and it struck the ivy, and it withered." Where now, O Jonas, where is thy ivy? Where thy joy? Thy ivy has drooped and decayed! thy joy has fled upon the wings of the morning! In like manner will our ivy, our short-lived and flimsy delights, droop and perish! "For the hope of the hypocrite is but for a moment,"* whereas the joy of the just is eternal.

CHAPTER III.

HOW DELICIOUS IS THE RELISH OF ETERNITY MAY BE SEEN FROM THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLE.

Theodorus, born of Christian parents, though young in years, yet ripe in judgment and discretion, had this truth profoundly engraven upon his mind. For on the occasion of a public festival celebrated in Egypt, when there was a magnificent banquet in his father's house, and whilst the guests were laughing, and shouting, and dancing, he like a dove wounded with a chaste arrow, retired into his closet, and

* Job xx. 6.

thus poured out his moanings: "Unhappy Theodorus! what will it avail thee to gain the whole world? Thou hast already many possessions, but how long will they be thine? Thou overflowest with abundance; thou mayst revel at the festive board, and amuse thyself in threading the giddy dance, and with all the frivolities suitable to thy youth: but how long mayst thou live at this thine ease, surrounded by these smiling pleasures? This jovial kind of life would give every satisfaction, provided that it would continue. But alas! how critical is my position! Shall I riot in these pleasures and forfeit eternal happiness? Tell me, my soul, is it a principle allowed by the Christian religion, to fashion for ourselves a heaven upon earth; to flit, like the bee, from flower to flower, sucking the honey from every earthly enjoyment, and then pass from the happiness of earth to the happiness of heaven? If I am not very much deceived, Christ has pointed out a very different path, a path that is strewed with thorns, as the only one which conducts to eternal bliss. Oh! tear thyself with unflinching resolution from these momentary pleasures, and grasp with a firm and powerful hand those which are eter-

nal!" When he had finished this soliloquy his eyes became moistened with tears, and withdrawing into a private chamber, and prostrating himself upon the floor, he poured forth the following prayer: "O Almighty and Eternal God! before Thee my heart lies open, and its inmost recesses revealed; to Thee my sighs and prayers ascend as incense; what I ought to ask from Thee, or in what manner I ought to ask it, I scarcely know. This one thing, however, I implore with all the fervour of my soul: Suffer me not to die an everlasting death. Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee, and desire to love and praise Thee for ever. Lord, have mercy on me." Whilst he was thus praying his mother entered the chamber, and noticing his red and moistened eyes, saw that he had been weeping, and said to him: "Whence, my son, is all this grief and sadness? Why hast thou spent so much of this joyful day in solitude? The feast invites thee. Thou alone art wanting to complete the hilarity of the banqueting hall. Thy company is eagerly desired and sought for." To whom Theodorus replied: "Account, dear mother, for my absence by some honest excuse. My stomach is out of order; and to par-

take, in this state, either of food or drink, would make me unwell. You would not, in these circumstances, persuade me, I am sure, to do so." Having alleged this plausible excuse, his mother retired, and he gave himself wholly to pious conversation with God about the great truths of Eternity. He began to ruminate attentively upon his state and manner of life. "What," he said to himself, "have I hitherto been? or rather what shall I be henceforth, if I do not wish to forfeit my title to eternal happiness? Various are the ways to Heaven. One travels by this, another by that; but what matter, provided we finally reach it? But all the ways are not indifferent to all persons, for we have not all the same disposition; hence we must choose that which is most suitable to our vocation and turn of mind. One is a shorter path; another longer and more difficult. If I fear the longer and more dangerous one, then there remains to me the shorter and safer, which if I deliberately prefer, the angels will applaud my choice, and will become my guardians and protectors. But will not my friends be made sorrowful by this selection? At first they probably will, but afterwards they will most likely

rejoice. Act valiantly, then, O Theodorus, and defer not thy resolution too long, nor flinch from thy noble purpose! I hope that I shall prove courageous when I encounter powerful adversaries. But if I shall have to confront those who have been kind to me, and who will now weep for me and flatter me? Oh! these I dread far more than the former. But be brave, my soul, and show thy valour. If thou art changeable by nature; by grace Christ can give thee fortitude, and render thee inflexible. What! if thy mother with streaming eyes should implore thee by the breasts that gave thee suck? Listen to the advice of St. Jerome. 'Fly for protection to the standard of the cross.' To be cruel in such a case as this will constitute thy virtue. Thou hast another and more excellent mother, who shows thee the breasts that nourished thy Saviour; the Blessed Virgin Mary, thy especial patroness, who will be to thee more than a thousand mothers, if thou wilt prove thyself a worthy son. The enterprise I contemplate is, indeed, a very arduous one. A total change of life, in one of my age, is, I must confess, a very difficult, a very arduous undertaking. But hearken to the lessons of experience.

They who begin to serve God late in life, seldom serve Him fervently and faithfully. They, without doubt, act the part of prudence and wisdom, who learn to bear the yoke of the Lord from their youth. But I have hitherto been brought up most tenderly and most delicately: how, then, can I attempt an austere and mortified life? How can I hope to abstain from all things, that I may obtain the mastery over myself? I do hope, nevertheless. But for how long? For one or two years? This will not be sufficient; we must proceed farther, we must persevere unto the end, unto death. Weigh, therefore, well this important truth, that it will be better never to commence, than having commenced, not to persevere to the end. I feel that, by myself, I should not be able to surmount the many difficulties and trials that await me, but with God for my companion and protector, what need I fear? Shall I not possess sufficient fortitude for every danger, for every laudable undertaking? But it is a very painful and by no means an easy task to strive for the mastery over old habits. I have, to the present period, lived the free and gay life of a nobleman; shall I now begin the hum-

ble and laborious life of a slave? How long shall I be able to pursue this painful course? It is not lawful for me to appear upon the stage in the character of a poor man, and in two or three days to throw it aside. No; where the salvation of the soul is at stake, we must persevere in the same character to the very last act, and depart as we enter. If you once come forth in the poor man's garments, you will not be allowed to return to your purple and fine linen, except when you put on the robes of immortality and everlasting glory. Oh! Theodorus, what wilt thou do in these long and trying scenes? I will copy the example of other eminent actors. I will look upon Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith, who humbled Himself to the condition of a servant, and patiently endure the greatest abasement and humiliation. Shall I shrink from doing what He has done? Am I better than He? Yet it is a very hard case to reduce oneself to these straits, to enter, as it were, a prison, the prison of the cloister. Behold thou wilt be delivered over to the control of another, who will do with thee whatever he pleases. In this, also, have I Christ for my pattern, who came, not to do His own

will, but the will of His Father, who is in heaven. I should not, perhaps, find it difficult to obey the will of a superior, if I could love and reverence that superior. But who is the superior that will have authority over me? It is man, indeed, who speaks, but God who gives the command, to whom, without any promise on thy part, thou owest obedience. But is not this too high a strain of philosophy, for a man to abandon his riches and lead a life of absolute poverty? If thou carriest out thy design, thou wilt have to beg; whereas thou art now able to bestow alms. Do not seek for or expect the enjoyments of thy former life, in the holy state of religion.

'But how long must I thus contend with myself, and fluctuating between hope and fear, ebb and flow like the Euripus seven times in twenty-four hours? Do I not behold before me my divine Master, the most perfect of all models? Do I not gaze upon Jesus Christ nailed to the cross, insulted, and treated with every kind of injury? He left the glory and the riches of heaven to dwell upon this dreary and barren earth. What did He possess during His sojournment here below? Let His birth and death inform you. On His entrance into the

world. He had no habitation but a ruined stable; on His departure from it He had not wherewith to cover His naked body; and He expired stripped of His garments. What was His condition during the thirty-three years He abode on earth? A fugitive wearied with travel, thirst, and the scorching of a summer's sun. How indefatigable in doing good! How patient in suffering insults and provocations! What sublime lessons has He not taught us! What heroic actions has He not performed for our example! Who so solicitous for poverty? So prompt to labour? So meek in the endurance of contumely? Shall I be ashamed of such a master? Or shall Theodorus decline being such as his Jesus, heavenly teacher, wishes him to be? I am ready, O Lord, I am ready, through love of Thee, to endure cold, hunger, and thirst; I am willing to be despised, to be bound in chains, to be burnt, to be cut in pieces; all these are but momentary torments, which cannot last a very long time. The joys or the torments of Eternity alone can be said to be long in duration; and eternal happiness is my sole wish."*

With his soul inflamed by these lively

* Life of St. Pachom. ch, 29.

meditations, he longed with an ardent desire for the enjoyment of eternal bliss. He determined, therefore, to bid a final adieu to his parents, his anticipated wealth and flattering pleasures. He was not hasty in his measures, soon hot and soon cold, but firm and unshaken in his resolution. He was not immediately that which he desired to be, but his perseverance was crowned with success, and he became a fervent disciple of St. Pachomius. You have seen the prologue, but, contrary to the rules of the stage, no tragedy follows; for, to a sorrowful commencement there succeeds a joyful termination. He began in tears, he terminated by a sweet and happy death, amidst the acclamations of the angels. Thus, Theodorus, when he had imbibed by reflection the very marrow as it were of eternity, would not have refused to become a bye-word and outcast to the world, provided that he did not believe with the world Eternity to be a fable.

Do you, dear Christian, wish to learn from Theodorus, yea, from St. Paul, yea, from Christ Himself, a very serious and important lesson? Many Christians live as if Eternity were a fable. "Wide is

the gate and broad is the way which leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat." Certainly men would not go in at the wide gate of destruction, if they firmly believed that they would not return any more, but remain in the bottomless pit for endless ages, or if they were fully persuaded that there is an Eternity. In this manner is Eternity treated as a pious fable. Yet, how many make this solemn declaration: "We do believe in Eternity: we hope to participate in its enjoyments: we ardently desire its possession." But how small is the spark of your hope! how feeble your faith! how lukewarm, or rather cold, your desire! Present pleasure, money in hand, and the allurements of the flesh, so fully take possession of the hearts of the million, as to extinguish in them, by a gentle and gradual oblivion, all love of Eternity. We hear repeated a thousand times over: "Thus saith the Lord, this is the commandment of the Lord." Yet, as often as we hear these words we neglect them. Let the Lord say and command what He pleases, our own way after all is the most pleasant. "We have no hopes, for we will go after our own thoughts, and we

will do every one according to the perverseness of his evil heart. Therefore, saith the Lord: Ask among the nations, Who hath heard such horrible things."* Would the heathens who knew not God have despised these mysterious truths of Eternity, had they known them? O ye sons of men, "because I called and you refused," says the Almighty, "I stretched out my hand, and there was none that regarded; you have despised all my counsels, and have neglected my reprehensions; I also will laugh in your destruction, and mock when that shall come upon you, which you feared; when sudden calamity shall fall on you, and destruction as a tempest be at hand; when tribulation and distress shall come upon you,"† and Eternity seize upon you, and make you its prey for ever. Oh, if death overtake you in this miserable condition, the sentence is passed at once, the gate is closed never again to be opened! "Depart from me," is the punishment denounced upon you by your offended Judge,—"Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels."‡

* Jerem. xviii. 12, 13.

† Prov. i. 24. ‡ Math. xxv. 41.

Watch, therefore, O Christians, I beseech you, watch. The Judge is standing at the gate, at the judgment seat. That may happen in a moment which can never be rectified during the endless ages of Eternity. The great St. Antony, in a sermon to his monks, thus addressed them: "In this life, dear brothers, our bargains are pretty equal, both to buyers and sellers; for a penny we receive a pennyworth. If you give me ten pieces of gold, I will return you perfumes to the same value. I count out to you fifty florins for so many measures of corn. But there is a very different mode in dealing in things that appertain to Eternity. Eternal merchandize is offered at a very small price. As a farthing is to a million crowns of gold, so is our labour to the happiness of Heaven. In the royal Psalmist we read: "The days of our years are threescore and ten; but if in the strong and robust they be fourscore, what is more of them is labour and sorrow."* If, then, we serve God faithfully and fervently, eighty, or at most a hundred years, we shall purchase a kingdom, and reign in it not merely a hundred years, but for ever,

* Psalm lxxxix. 10.

for ages without end. We shall inherit Heaven and not earth. Therefore, my dear children, do not let your present hard life make you weary and fatigued, or the ambition of vain glory delight you. For the momentary sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us. Let him who has abandoned this world not think that he has abandoned anything very great. For what is time compared to Eternity? Or what are perishable and momentary possessions in view of those which are infinite and eternal? Even if we retained our riches, they would be forcibly taken from us by death. Why, then, do we not make a virtue of necessity? Why do we not willingly part with them whilst we have the choice, since we shall receive for this paltry treasure, this dust of earth, the infinite riches of Heaven?" These things are more fully related by St. Athanasius. In St. Antonii vita, cap. 15.

It was an ancient and perpetual custom with St. Pachomius, when any unlawful thought assailed his mind, to repel it by meditation on Eternity. If it returned he would still array against it the eternal torments of hell, the worm that will never

die, the fire that is never to be quenched. These are the words of the Saint himself: "Before all things have always before the eyes of your mind the last day, and dread every moment the everlasting torments of hell."

CONSIDERATION IX.

CERTAIN CONCLUSIONS AND SAYINGS ABOUT ETERNITY.

"To him be glory, both now and unto the day of Eternity."—2 PETER, iii 18.

"And man shall go into the house of his Eternity." Oh! how unlike are the two houses of Eternity, in one of which we must dwell; either in the mansions of eternal bliss, or in the prison of eternal and devouring fire.

CONSIDERATION IX.

CERTAIN CONCLUSIONS AND SAYINGS ABOUT ETERNITY.

CONCLUSION I.

No one can conceive, much less express, the infinite duration of Eternity. Between a living man and a statue,—between real and painted fire, there is an immense difference; yet, even these are said to be like each other. But, between our fire and the fire of hell,—between our sorrows and the pains of the damned, there is not the slightest comparison; because the former are measured by *Time*, the latter by *Eternity*. Christ has elegantly expressed this truth in the parable of the vine: "If any man abide not in me, he shall be cast forth as a branch, and shall wither, and they shall gather him up, and cast him into the fire, and he *burneth*."* Here Eternity is very

* John xv. 6.

appropriately and very briefly described in one word,—"*he burneth.*" All the other words of our Redeemer have a future signification: "*He shall be cast forth, and wither; and they shall gather him up,*" &c. But it is not said, "and he shall burn;" no: simply "*he burneth.*" This will be the unchangeable state of the reprobate, an undiminishing and ever-enduring present. A thousand years will pass away, and it will still be said, "*he burneth;*" another thousand, and still "he burneth," the very same as at the commencement. Thousands of years will succeed to thousands, and millions of ages to millions, until words will fail for the utterance of the tongue, and ideas for the conception of the mind, and still the same exclamation will arise from the bottom of hell, "*he burneth.*" And if, after this incalculable lapse of centuries, we should inquire, What such a damned soul is doing? What is he suffering? The very same answer would be returned: "*he burneth*" in unquenchable, indescribable, and eternal fire. And thus it will be from year to year, and age to age, for ever! for ever! On this passage of Holy Scripture St. Augustine has beautifully observed: "The branch is sub-

ject to one of these alternatives; it must either abide in the vine, or in the fire; if it grow not in the vine, it will burn in the fire. That it may not be cast into the fire, let it, therefore, abide in the vine."*

CONCLUSION II.

If they who are in mortal sin did but know how near they are to Eternity and to everlasting torments, since by the slightest indication of God's will they might be delivered over to death, and transferred by death into the power of the devil, they would not for the vast dominions of Spain, or for all the treasures of Asia, or for the whole world itself, put off their repentance and confession for a single hour, much less lie down at night steeped in grievous sin. "For what will it avail a man to gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?"† Though thou mayst lose everything else in the world, O Christian, remember at least to save thy soul. Arialdus, the Deacon of Milan, the chief nobleman of his country, for he was brother to the Marquis, and remarkable for the sanctity

* Tract 81 in Joannem.

† Math. xvi. 26.

of his life, and for his constant opposition to heretics and other flagitious sinners, lost almost all his members, and at length was conducted to martyrdom. His ears were lopped off, his upper lip mutilated, his nose cut off, his tongue torn out by the roots, his eyes extinguished, his right hand amputated, and—but I will not mention any more. This holy man, in a body almost hacked to pieces, saved his soul. He lost his life on earth, (1066) that he might gain it in everlasting glory.*

Such a generous soldier of Christ, mindful of Eternity, enters into that which was, as Seneca terms it, and always will be. St. Augustine† has said very appropriately: "What shall we do, brethren, except, whilst we have time, change our lives, and correct our manners in those things which are sinful? So that the punishment which will undoubtedly fall upon sinners, may not fall upon us; because by our repentance we shall have avoided the threatened danger. Whatever we learn from Holy Scripture is from the voice of God, our Infallible Teacher, bidding us *watch*. And whatever we suffer, whatever may be our

* Syrus presbyt. in ejus vita ad Rud.

† Lent. Consol. ad Helviam.

tribulations in this life, they are the scourges of God anxious to correct us here, that we may not perish hereafter. We feel a horror of them when they are mentioned to us, as things very hard and painful to be endured; but the severest trials any one can suffer in this life, are not to be named, and dwindle away into nothing, in comparison with eternal fire."*

CONCLUSION III.

A great many Christians, and even some Catholics, believe not that there is an Eternity of torments in hell, or an Eternity of happiness in Heaven. For if this truth was firmly fixed in the mind, they would not live as they do. To them is applicable this question of our Redeemer: "The Son of man, when he cometh, shall he find, think you, faith on earth?" Luke xviii. 8. Some there are who would wish to be thought believers in the great truth of Eternity; they make profession of it in their faith, but deny it in their works. They seldom or never think of Eternity; or if their attention is sometimes directed to it, it is merely to catch a glance of it,

* Aug. Tom. 10, Serm. 109. de Temp.

but not to ponder upon it, not to make it the subject of their meditation, not to examine it by profound reflection, not to employ upon it both the understanding and the will, not to fix it permanently in their imagination. The moment it enters the mind it vanishes again, so that if any spark of good should arise from this casual thought of Eternity, it is immediately quenched by the cares of business and the pleasures of life, as if by a stream of water. Thus many, very many, go to eternal death with their eyes blindfolded, and their ears closed against every salutary admonition. The holy Fathers observe that the rich glutton never once lifted up his eyes until he found himself in the bottomless pit of hell. All his life long he had his eyes closed, especially to the poor and to things calculated to promote his edification. He opened them for the first time when he was in the burning flames of Gehenna; then, alas! it was too late. We need not wonder that so many are hastening with both hands and feet to the house of everlasting weeping; for the way is very broad, pleasant, smooth, and well trodden. It is difficult to wander from such a beaten and well-known path; and no one fancies that he can lose

himself in it, except towards the end of the journey. Many more would be delighted with this agreeable path if the end were not so terrible. They take, therefore, the part of prudence, and prefer to this short but pleasant path which leads to prison, to perpetual tears, and to never-ending sorrows, the narrow and the rugged way, which conducts to eternal felicity. True is the observation of the venerable Job: "As a cloud is consumed, and passeth away; so he that shall go down to hell shall not come up; nor shall he return any more into his house; neither shall his place know him any more."*

CONCLUSION IV.

He who heartily descends into the profound and serious contemplation of Eternity, will not only not live a licentious and wanton life, but will seldom be found obstreperously laughing and joking. All who have been raised from the dead, and been favoured with a view of the other world, have seldom, on their return to this land of exile, been seen to laugh. This was particularly the case with the friend of Christ,

* Job vii. 9.

Lazarus, in his residence at Bethania. All were of the same mind as the Wise man: "Laughter I counted error; and to mirth, I said: Why art thou vainly deceived?"* Rightly did St. Cyril of Alexandria confess himself to be fearful upon this subject, and declare his dread of Gehenna, the fire of which will never be extinguished, and stand in awe of that worm which dieth not, and which will never cease its gnawings. "O that men would be wise, and would understand, and would provide for their last end."† He whom this reflection upon Eternity does not prompt to a better life, I say briefly, but forcibly, either has not faith, or if he has faith, has not the proper use of his reason. A man of learning once affirmed with more truth than plausibility, that "matrimony was a short and pleasant song, which had a long and mournful termination." We may even more justly say, that the pleasure of sin is a merry but brief song, which has a fearfully long and sorrowful conclusion, the everlasting torments of hell! O Eternity! Eternity! Eternity!

* Eccles. ii. 2. † Dout. xxxii. 29.

CONCLUSION V.*

When we speak of Eternity we cannot say too much, or be guilty of exaggeration. Whatever may be said will not surpass the merits of the subject, for however high our calculation, or profound our thought, or expansive our conception, it must necessarily fall short of that which is infinite and eternal. Has not Eternity this peculiar property, that whatever you deduct from it, it still remains what it was, whole and entire? Subtract from it as many years as there are stars in the firmament, drops in the ocean, grains of sand on the shore, leaves on the trees, and blades of grass on the surface of the green earth, it still stands before you undiminished,—"futurity for ever future, a race without an end." Add as many years as we have just named, and it will not be increased, it will not be made more than it is, an interminable duration. As long as God is God, He will punish the damned. We have already depicted this truth under a variety of similitudes. We will subjoin another from the works of St. Bonaventure.*

If any one should so weep over the con-

* Bonav. de Inf. cap. 49.

dition of the reprobate, as to shed for their unhappy doom a single tear every hundred years, these tears would in the lapse of ages swell into a mighty sea. But how many millions of centuries would it not take to make even a small rivulet, much more a vast ocean, by such a slow process? And even then it would be perfectly true to say, Here begins Eternity! Nay, more than this; when many such oceans would have been formed in the same tardy manner, it would be still incumbent upon us to exclaim: This is but the commencement of Eternity! With similar calculations we might go on ever!

Here there is nothing of a doubtful nature, for there can be no kind of proportion between that which is finite and that which is infinite. This may appear something wonderful and incredible, because the human imagination cannot grasp it within its narrow span. We cannot with the loftiest flight of the mind reach that which is so remote; we cannot penetrate that which is infinite, because it is impenetrable. And this may be one reason why our attention is with difficulty brought to bear upon the subject of Eternity. We feel either shame or indignation in fatiguing ourselves with

that which the mind cannot penetrate. We must not, however, yield to this pernicious shame, but compel the understanding to resume every day this most salutary meditation, and to exercise itself in such similitudes and reflections as will be proper to assist it in this pious labour. Here there can be no danger of error. Think of whatever number of years we please—myriads multiplied by myriads—we shall never attain to the right product, for there will remain as many more, and so on for ever. This is a certain and undoubted truth.

The Prophet Daniel, to help our comprehension of Eternity, employeth these words: "They that are learned shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that instruct many unto justice, as stars for all Eternity."* Which is equivalent to this acknowledgment: To explain Eternity words are wanting; for I cannot say more, although much more ought to be said. Observe his figure of amplification: "*all Eternity; perpetuas æternitates,—perpetual eternities.*" If one Eternity be interminable, what shall we say of two, ten, a hundred, a thousand, yea, of perpetual Eternities? If we should multiply the

* Dan. xii. 3.

Great Year a thousand times over, it would not be the least fraction to the sum of Eternity. It is said that the eighth sphere of the celestial planets revolves with slower motion than the others, though it is propelled daily and rapidly by the Primum Mobile. Hence it completes its orbit only every 36,000 years. This is called the Great or Platonic Year. Let us compare this to Eternity, and what is it but an instant, an imperceptible movement of the hand upon the dial, the single beat of a clock's pendulum? Truly was it affirmed by Boetius: "An instant or a point of time and ten thousand years more resemble, and are more equal to, each other, than ten thousand years and Eternity." St John, the Evangelist, gave this exhortation: "My little children, it is the last hour."* This was 1856 years ago. Very properly, then, does St. Augustine affirm, that every thing which has an end is short. Eternity, as it is a word, is composed of four syllables, but in itself it has no end. Love, therefore, Eternity. Let Christ be your end, and then you will reign with Christ in happiness without end.

* 1 Epist. ii. 18.

CONCLUSION VI.

It is not credible that any man imbued with the principles of natural religion can be found so unruly, so headstrong, provided he does not live like a beast and rush headlong into sensuality, for the wretched man when he hath plunged into the depths of sin, laugheth at his impiety; it is not credible that any man, I repeat, imbued with the principles of natural religion, can be found so unruly, so headstrong, who, if he give but a quarter of an hour each day, to meditation on Eternity, or if only once in the week he makes this meditation, will not change his course of life, will not become another man, and from a proud and haughty bearing become humble and modest, from an irascible disposition become meek and merciful, from proneness to carnal pleasure become chaste and continent, and from inebriety become temperate and sober. Such a one will become a true religious, at least in heart and in the correctness of his life, if not by the adoption of the religious habit. This change, however, is not to be wrought suddenly, accidentally, or involuntarily. The

subject will be brought before the eye of the mind again and again, will engage the most serious and most profound thought of the understanding, and will return after many deep considerations to be reviewed afresh, and finally before adoption; so that there will be, as it were, a perpetual sound booming upon the wakeful ears of the soul, and proclaiming, Eternity! Eternity! Eternity! which will never come to an end! no, never, never, never! which will continue through ages in number beyond all comprehension, and which will never cease its endless round of existence! This consideration should be turned over and over in the mind, as the cud is chewed by cattle. The most wholesome and the most delicate viands, if not masticated and digested, become poison, and not food for the sustenance of the body. They produce all kinds of diseases, and though they remain a long time in the body, yet yield no nourishment. So, likewise, thoughts of death, judgment, hell, and heaven, are salutary and pious; but the thought of Eternity may be deemed even more profitable, and the fifth essential reflection conducive to our salvation. These thoughts, however, of the last things to be remem-

bered, like the wholesome food we have just mentioned, must not pass merely through the mind, but must be digested and converted by frequent reflection into the healthy nourishment of the soul. Man, when alone, and free from noise and care and worldly distractions, must entertain them in his inward house, and ruminate upon them until they become food profitable for his salvation. Many Christians listen to a variety of sermons, and read many excellent books, but derive little or no benefit from these advantages, because they do not reflect upon that which they hear or read. All the instructions to which they have hearkened, have vanished away before they could produce any fruit, have flown and gone for ever! If then we wish to profit by our pious reading, and by public instruction, we must ponder attentively that which is communicated to us for our edification and salvation. Our Blessed Lady gives us an excellent lesson upon this subject. "Mary kept all these words (which were spoken by the shepherds) pondering them in her heart."*

* Luke ii. 19.

CONCLUSION VII.

Few understand and weigh well these plain words of Holy Scripture: "Enter ye in at the narrow gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are that go in thereat. How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life, and few there are that find it!"* They are again repeated by St. Luke, xiii. 24: "Strive to enter by the narrow gate; for many, I say to you, shall seek to enter, and shall not be able." Whoever ridicules this doctrine, and fancies that he is not bound to believe it, because he does not see the events here mentioned; "When that shall happen which he did not believe," says St. Chrysostom, "then shall he be overwhelmed with confusion, and separated from the just, and have his portion with the reprobate." Jerome Platust reports that not long after the family of Don Francis had been established, an eminent member of this family, Bertoldus, spoke so eloquently, and with so much force and unc-

* Math. vii. 13.

† Sermo. 64. de verb. Dom.

tion, from the pulpit against a certain vice, that a woman listening to him and feeling herself guilty, dropped down dead; but that immediately the prayers of the congregation were offered to Heaven for her recovery, she came to herself, and thus related why she had been commanded to return to life, and also what she had seen in the other world. "Whilst I was standing," she said, "before the tribunal of God, there were grouped together with me 60,000 souls, which were gathered from every part of the world, and summoned to the judgment seat by divers kinds of deaths. Of this immense crowd, three alone were cast into purgatory. The remainder were sentenced to everlasting torments." Certainly I would not believe this woman's narrative, unless I had first heard from the lips of Christ this affirmation: "Wide is the gate," &c. Who, indeed, would believe that eternal punishment is pronounced not only upon 60,000, but upon six hundred times 60,000, by the just decree of God, unless he is at the same time fully persuaded of this fact by the Infinite and Supreme Majesty of God, who thus punishes the atrocious and inexplicable malice of sin against His divine attributes?

Upon this point we have the most evident testimonies of Holy Scripture. The venerable Job trembles at the bare mention of the bottomless pit, "where no order but everlasting horror dwells."* St. Matthew thus relates to us the sentence pronounced upon the reprobate: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." † The Church in her office for the dead, speaketh for her children these words: "The fear of death troubles me, who am sinning daily and not repenting. Have mercy on me, O God, and save me, because in hell there is no redemption." Oh, no! none whatever! no, not the very slightest consolation! not even a drop of water hanging on the tip of the fingers, is allowed to be brought into that fiery dungeon! If those who live habitually in the grace of God, who have pious minds and good dispositions, could but apprehend the fearful torments from which they will be delivered at the day of judgment, and the infinite joy of which they will be put in possession by the gracious invitation of the Judge, they would not defer a single hour in transferring all kinds of vanities to the vain, in allowing the dead to bury the dead, in entirely

* x. 22. † xxv. 41.

abandoning the world to its votaries, and in forthwith embracing the holy state of religion, in which they might please God in all their actions, and love Him with the glowing affection of their souls, and praise Him during the remainder of their earthly pilgrimage, for the twofold benefit about to be conferred upon them, an eternal deliverance from the pool burning with fire and brimstone, and a joyful admittance into the everlasting bliss of the celestial Paradise. St. Gregory* tells us that the evils of the present life seem the more unsupportable, in proportion as we neglect to think of the happiness which will follow in the next. We fancy the crosses which we carry far more heavy than they are, because we reflect not upon the reward that will be given to those who carry them faithfully unto the end. If we did but fix the eye of the mind upon those things which are eternal and immutable, whatever contributed to their attainment, we should esteem as nothing. Joy amidst tribulation would be our evening canticle;† because, though oppressed by temporal affliction, we should rejoice in the hope of eternal felicity.

* Lib, 10. Moral. cap. 10.

† Lib. 26, moral. 102, in cap. 35, in Job.

In a similar manner St. Aug.* eloquently descants upon the subject. "When you reflect," he says, "upon that which you are about to receive, all the afflictions which you suffer will appear trivial, and unworthy to be mentioned, with the promised reward. For, dearly beloved brethren, to speak of condign reward, or of things of equal value, eternal labour only is equivalent to eternal rest, and eternal suffering to eternal happiness. But if you had to toil on for ever, and endure eternal affliction, where would be your eternal rest and your eternal felicity? Your labour, then, and your painful trials are necessarily limited to time, and come, therefore, quickly to an end, that you may enter into the possession of infinite and eternal happiness. Balance, if you please, a thousand years against Eternity: but why say a thousand? or ten thousand? or a hundred times ten thousand? or a million times ten million? or, indeed, any finite number which must necessarily have an end? why put these in the scales with Eternity, with which they cannot bear the smallest shadow of comparison? Hence God does not only wish your labour to be temporal, but

* In Psalm xxxvi.

also of short duration. The whole life of man is composed of a few short days. Although any one, through the whole period of his sojurnment on earth, should be weighed down with manifold toil, and trouble, and sorrow; yea, though he should endure every day to the last of his life imprisonment, persecution, hunger and thirst, yet it would be true to say, that his sufferings were of short duration. Few are the days of man's pilgrimage, and his labour momentary and light, which when completed, pays the price of an eternal kingdom, and is succeeded by happiness which knows no diminution, no termination. Then are we made the companions of angels, heirs of God and coheirs with Christ. For a light and short labour, what a great reward!

The same saint informs us in his sermons on the 91st Psalm, that the thoughts of God are infinitely profound. "Where is God's thought? He relaxeth the reins for the present; but afterwards He draweth them in. Do not, like the fish, rejoice over the bait, unmindful of the hook, which the angler has not yet drawn towards him by the line, and which is already in the poor fish's mouth. For the time which appears

to you long may be very short. All things quickly pass away. What is the longest life of man to the Eternity of God? Would you be patient and long suffering? Consider God's Eternity. Think of the fewness of your days; and in these few days do you wish that all things should be accomplished? that all the wicked should be condemned to everlasting torments? that all the just should be crowned with unfading glory? Do you wish that all these things should be fulfilled during the brief day of your mortality? Rest assured that God will accomplish them in His own good time. He is eternal, long-suffering and plenteous in mercy. But you may say, we have not the virtue of longanimity, because we are mortal and subject to death. Yet you have it in your power to be so, by uniting your hearts to the Eternity of God, and then you will be eternal with Him. If you are well instructed, you will be persuaded that God reserveth all things to His own judgment. The virtuous labour and are scourged as sons; the wicked rejoice because they are contemned as aliens. A certain man has two sons. The one he chastiseth, the other he leaveth in peace.

The latter, when he doth anything wrong is not corrected by his father; the former scarcely commits the smallest fault without immediate stripes and punishment. Why is the one thus left in the enjoyment of his own will, whilst the other is scourged for every trivial offence? He who is kept to his duty by the severity of discipline, is heir to his father's property; whilst he who is left at liberty to follow his own pleasure is disinherited. The father sees no probability of correcting him, and therefore leaves him at his own ease and to the guidance of his own wayward will. The son who is corrected, if he does not possess a wise and prudent mind, will probably congratulate his brother upon his freedom from punishment, and bemoan his own irksome condition in such lamentations as these: 'My brother does a great many evil deeds, and follows his own fancies contrary to the commands of my father, and yet no one saith to him a wrong word; whilst I scarcely do anything at all wrong, without being chided and reproved. For the most insignificant trifles, sharp words and heavy blows are ready to fall upon me.' Oh! he knows not how foolish and imprudent he is for making this complaint,

because he regards that which he suffers now, simply without any reference to the immense reward which is reserved for him hereafter."

To these instructions of this most holy and learned prelate, we may appropriately subjoin the following, as the epitome of all that we have hitherto said.* "How wonderful is the mercy of God! He does not say labour ten hundred thousand years, nor a thousand, no, nor five hundred; but simply labour during the brief period of your mortal life, for the few years I have allotted you. After this you shall enter into that sweet rest which will have no interruption, and know no end. Yes, labour for a few years, and you shall not want consolation in your labours; for you will experience daily comfort and interior sweetness. Do not, however, rejoice with the world, but rejoice in Christ; rejoice in His infallible word; rejoice in His divine law. Perfectly true is this saying of the Apostle: 'For that which is at present momentary, and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal

* St. Aug. in Psalm xciii.

weight of glory.' * What a small return do we make for this infinite reward! We receive everlasting treasures for a mere shell! For the mere husks of our brief labour, we are rewarded with eternal and ineffable rest! Are you joyful? Be not too confident. Are you sorrowful? Do not despair. Let no prosperity elevate you, or seduce you from the path of virtue; and let no adversity cast you down, and make you sad and sorrowful. For God hath promised eternal life to those who despise and shun the felicity of the world. He hath threatened with everlasting fire those who avoid and contemn the mortifications and penances of this life."

We will conclude with these words of the same holy Father:† "Therefore let us love eternal life, and learn how much we ought to value it, since we behold men, lovers of the present momentary life, labouring so much and so hard, that when the fear of death is before their eyes, they do whatever is in their power, not to take death away altogether, but to defer it for ever so short a time, to put off for a little

* 2 Corinth. iv. 17

† Serm. 64, De verbis Dom.

while the evil day of their departure into the regions of darkness. How vigorously will a man exert himself when he sees the approaches of death! He will flee away from the dangerous neighbourhood, and conceal himself in the best manner he can. He will give away, he will part with anything to redeem his life. He will submit to any toil and fatigue, any pains and inconveniences. He will call in the ablest physicians, punctually obey their orders, and put forth every exertion to obtain even a short reprieve. You see, then, what unpleasant things a man will endure, and how readily he will spend his fortune, to prolong a little longer his earthly existence. For to live for ever in this world is entirely out of the question. If therefore, so much is done, so great an exertion made, so much treasure expended, so much anxiety endured, so much attention and care bestowed, that a feeble and perishable life may be protracted during a few days more,—oh! what should we not do that we may live eternally? If they who take every precaution within their power to guard against death, and preserve their lives a short time longer, are generally called prudent persons,—Oh! how foolish

are they who so live here, that they lose the Sabbath day of rest eternally hereafter."

Reflect, O Christians! Reflect, O mortals! before you become immortal, and either eternally joyful or eternally sorrowful,—upon these important truths, and provide for your Eternity! All things pass away! but Eternity shall not pass away!

CHAPTER I.

THE PUNISHMENT OF ETERNAL DEATH.

The Messenians had a subterraneous dungeon, from which all air and light were excluded, and which was truly a place of infernal horror. To this most dismal and fatal prison, they gave the fair but deceitful name of treasure. There were no gates to this hellish dungeon; for the prisoners were let down into it through a well or funnel, over which was rolled an immense stone, shutting out all possibility of escape, and all communication with the land of the living.—In this treasury Philopæmen, an eminent military commander in

Greece, was confined, and here ended his days by poison. God has likewise His treasury under ground. And what kind of prison is it? The abode of the most wicked, the most desperate, and the most loathsome characters, which have been sentenced to everlasting torments.

Actiolinus, tyrant of Padua, had many prisons so constructed for inflicting every kind of torment and violent pain, that death, though often desired, yet slow in coming, was deemed the greatest happiness which could befall the prisoners.* As many as were cast into these prisons were laden with heavy chains, stifled by deleterious effluvia, starved by famine, eaten up with vermin, and consumed by a lingering and painful death. They greatly rejoiced when they felt their miserable life near its end. Every one thought himself most wretched, and envied him whom death had set free from his misery. For it was a punishment far more grievous than immediate death, to be obliged to dwell among dead bodies piled one upon another in every stage of putrefaction, and producing so frightful and pestilential a stench, that it

* Paul Jovius lib. elog. in Actiolinum.

was perfectly true to affirm, the dead were killing the living.

But the worst of these dungeons may be termed a paradise, a magnificent palace, in comparison with the infernal dungeon of hell. For all the torments endured in the prison of Actiolinus, were tolerable, because they were brief, because they brought with them their own termination, because they could not extend beyond the boundary of human life, because they lost their power the moment death fixed his seal upon their victims. But that treasury which is the prison house of God, has no cessation from the infliction of torments, has no consolation, no, not the least drop—is not subject to the control of death—allows of no escape or departure, and has no termination! No, never! never! never! Well might Cassiodorus exclaim: "As no one can comprehend the reward which is eternal, so in like manner no one can conceive what that torment is which is without end—which is inflicted everlastingly."

In Persia there was a prison into which any one might easily enter, but from which no one could depart. It was called *Lethe* or *oblivion*. The descent into hell is easy, but to escape from it impossible. There is

a very wide entrance, but no exit. No one that has ever passed its portals can retrace his steps. This prison of divine justice may with strict propriety be called *lethe* or *oblivion*, for the Almighty blots out the damned from His remembrance, that He may have no regard to them in the distribution of His favours and graces, but cast them off for all Eternity. "Hell," observes a pious and learned author,* "is really the region of oblivion, for a two-fold reason; in the first place, because they who are in hell are no longer mindful of God, as He is infinitely good and charitable; nor have they any remembrance of their former pomps and vanities and criminal pleasures, save that which is most painful, and far worse than absolute oblivion. In the second place, hell is a land entirely abandoned by God and His good angels, because they who dwell in it will never be able to leave it. It will be their abode of sorrow and banishment for ever! "Between us and you," said Abraham to the rich glutton, "there is fixed a great chaos, so that they who would pass from hence to you, cannot, nor from thence come hither."† O dreadful chaos! O eternal

* Francis Tilelman in Ps. 87. † Luke xvi. 26

torments! how awful! how appalling! "Their sepulchres," says the Royal Prophet, speaking of the reprobate, "shall be their houses for ever!"* Such are the palaces which the unjust are building for themselves. "And the rich man died and was buried in hell." Oh, what a deep grave! In this mausoleum lies buried the gentleman, clothed in purple and fine linen, who neglected and despised the poor beggar Lazarus. A flame of fire is now his bed, instead of soft down: boiling sulphur is in the cup presented to his parched lips, instead of sparkling nectar; black pitch and filthy smoke are now served upon his banquet-table, instead of delicate and costly viands; in place of the giddy dance and the jocund song, there is heard the stamping of feet, the tearing off the hair from the head, and the violent gnashing of teeth through raving madness, through the convulsive pangs of endless and unmitigated despair. They who are in prison generally look forward, with some degree of consolation, to the day of their deliverance; but in hell there is no anticipation of pardon, no hope of redemption from captivity, no

* Psalm xlviii. 12.

possible chance of freedom, but an unceasing, endless, and eternal despair!

It was a short but terrible sermon that God delivered to the Prophet Ezechiel:* "Say to the south forest: Hear the word of the Lord: Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will kindle a fire in thee, and will burn in thee every green tree, and every dry tree; the flame of the fire shall not be quenched, and every face shall be burned in it, from the south even to the north. And all flesh shall see, that I the Lord have kindled it, and it shall not be quenched." How many lofty and majestic cedars, how many ungodly men in this life flourish exceedingly, through a continual succession of good fortune, and yet are withered and parched up through the want of virtue. Hear, therefore, both "every green tree and every dry tree, a fire is enkindled, and the flame of it shall not be quenched." In Gehenna, whither you are hastening, there will be no festival days, during which the furnace will cease to cast forth its flames and be at rest. Eternal sorrow, eternal death, eternal lamentation, will never be blended with, or softened by, the balm of consolation. Night and day,

* xx. 47.

the sleepless, ever wakeful and unextinguishable flames will pursue and torment you, and burn to the very marrow of your bones. You will live on for ever, that you may be always dying, and yet never dead. If you question my word, at least, give crdit to the eloquent and forcible words of St. Augustine.* "The reprobate possess life in the midst of the most excruciating agony, and they who live in these agonizing pains, desire, if possible, to terminate their miserable life; but no one comes to relieve them from their torments. Death pays not the slightest attention to their inward and heartrending sighs and groans. Now the Holy Scripture tells us that such a life as this is not worthy to be called living. For the name of life is a name of comfort and joyfulness, not of weeping and lamentation. But what gladness or consolation can there be in excruciating pains, in endless agony, in everlasting fire? Whenever there is mention of life, there is no idea, no thought of torments. To be always in grievous pain, is not any kind of life, but eternal death, which the sacred oracles call the *second death*, when the first one pronounced

* Tom. 10 Serm. 112 de Mart. massa Candida.

upon all the descendants of Adam, has freed us from the bondage of this world. It is called the *second death*, though no one that has part in it dies; or rather it should be said, that no one condemned to this state of never-ending death, lives. For to live in torture, is not to live. Therefore life spent in suffering is not worthy to be called life, for that only is true life, which is happy; but no life can be truly happy save that which is eternal." The same holy father confirms these truths in other places of his writings. "If the soul," he says, "liveth in the eternal torments, in which the devil and his wicked spirits are punished, it must not be called life, but everlasting death. For no greater or more fearful death can be imagined, than death which never dieth."

St. Gregory the Great furnishes us also with some striking remarks upon this subject.* "In the flames of Gehenna," he observes, "there will be death without death; end without end; because in that dismal dungeon death liveth on perpetually, and the end is always where the beginning is, and the beginning where the end is."

Pope Innocent likewise supplies us with

* Lib. 9, Mor. cap. 49.

these additional observations, well worthy of our remembrance. "There," he says, "death will be immortal. O death, how much sweeter wouldst thou be, if thou wouldst but take away life, in place of compelling thy victim to live, and to live on for ever!" So, however, it is. The years of the reprobate are without number and beyond calculation. God Himself cannot name their last year. After millions and billions and trillions, have been multiplied until the array of figures in the product extends beyond the field of our vision, and beyond the grasp of our imagination, just as many more will remain, and this onwards in succession until the mind is totally lost in the ocean of infinitude. So that not only the last year can never be discovered, but each succeeding year will be as the first. Cain, though he has been nearly six thousand years constantly dying the second death, has still before him the whole duration of his sorrow, as if this were the first day he had been cast into the prison of hell. And though so many ages have been deducted from the number, yet the product is not less than it was the first moment he began to burn. In like manner the rich glutton mentioned in the

Gospel, has endured the flames of hell two thousand years, and is yet burning, and will burn on for ever; and not a drop of water, however earnestly he may implore the boon, will ever be administered to cool his fiery tongue and quench his raging thirst.

These truths we often hear repeated; and when we hear them shall we laugh at them? Is it a trifling matter to dwell in devouring fire, to abide in everlasting flames? Here we may very properly ask: Where, O foolish and jesting mortals, where are your tears? Amongst such imprudent persons we may class ourselves. For the loss of a few pence we shed abundance of tears; but the awful and irreparable loss of our salvation, we can pass off with a foolish and ridiculous laugh! When summoned to the judgment seat of our fellow-creatures, we tremble. We are hastening by rapid steps and irresistibly to the dread tribunal of God, and yet we joke and play the fool on the way! Whenever we are about to launch upon the ocean, we feel more or less of trepidation at the dangers which await us. Now that we are journeying to Eternity, that we are about to set sail upon that ocean which is bounded by

no shore, and fathomed by no plummet, we lose our gravity, and drown our senses in untimely mirth!

It was the most earnest wish of St. Bernard that men would be wise: "O that they would be wise!" And what, pray, great saint, would this wisdom avail them? Oh! then would the image of Eternity be formed and shine forth in our minds. Then should we temper and regulate all present things by wisdom; judge of the past by the calm retrospect of right reason, and provide for the future, and for our last things, with a prudent foresight and timely precaution.*

Such, likewise, was not merely the desire but the command of St. Paul to the Ephesians:† "See, therefore, brethren, how you walk circumspectly; not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil." We must apply ourselves to the great business of our salvation circumspectly, diligently, and carefully; for it is the part of fools not to expend, but to lavish away this short time, granted us for the purpose of making provision for eternal felicity, in silly and vain

* Serm. de SS. Apost. P. et Paul.

† Ver. 15.

delights, and to barter away Heaven for idle jests and empty amusements. Time cannot be redeemed by retailing old wives' fables, by lingering over the intoxicating bowl, and by culpable sloth and idleness. No! it demands frequent prayer, serious labour, and indefatigable industry. St. Augustine advises us to steal some portion of time devoted to secular employments. When any one commences against you a suit at law, willingly give up something to your opponent, that you may be employed in the business of God, rather than in legal contention. For that which we thus lose becomes to us the price, or the redemption of time. As with money you buy bread, so with money purchase quietness, and the leisure wherein to serve God; for this is to redeem your time.

We ought to seek occasions of doing good at any cost, since the days are evil. The days of this life, says St. Anselm, are full of troubles, sorrows, dangers, temptations, and afflictions, which, either take away or diminish the opportunities of doing good. If then we allow the occasions of performing virtuous actions to slip by, and our whole life to flow away in mere resolutions of amendment, there will not be

left to us a single moment in which we shall be able to repair this neglect. Our life, says St. Gregory Nazianzen, is a mart or fair, which, when over, deprives us of the time and opportunity of buying and selling.* We should, therefore, make our purchases whilst the fair is going on, and during the lawfully appointed time. Whilst we have health and strength we must live piously. This is the instruction of the wise man. "Whatever thy hand is able to do, do it earnestly; for neither work, nor reason, nor wisdom, no knowledge, shall be in hell, whither thou art hastening."† The great Apostle of the Gentiles frequently exhorts us to employ our time carefully in doing good. "Therefore," he says,‡ "whilst we have time, let us work good to all men, but especially to those who are of the household of faith. Knowing the season, that it is now the hour for us to rise from sleep. You sleep, says St. Ambrose, but time does not sleep. It runs—yea, flies. Happy are they who do not only think of these things, but do them, who so work and so live now as they would wish to have lived, when at

* In Sentent.

† Eccles. ix. 10. ‡ Gal. vi. 10. Rom. xiii. 11.

the hour of death, and who perform those good deeds which will make them rejoice through the endless ages of Eternity. *A slight neglect here will prove an eternal loss hereafter.* That which we have thought, spoken, and done once, has been thought, and spoken, and done for ever!

CHAPTER II.

THE REWARD OF ETERNAL LIFE.

Life spent in the enjoyment of Heaven may be truly called life in the fullest sense of the term, whether considered as animal, human, angelic, or divine. There memory lives in the perfect recollection of all past events. There the understanding lives in the knowledge and vision of God. There, also lives the will in the enjoyment of every species of happiness, without the slightest fear of molestation or disinheritance. There all the senses live and enjoy their own peculiar delights. In that region of bliss there is no sighing, no lamentation, no grief or mourning. There overflows the sweet bowl of joy and delight, unmingled with the smallest drop of gall and sadness. O

mortal eyes, speak not of your dim vision, for you have seen no beauties on earth equal to the glories of heaven! O mortal ears, what melody have you heard like to the music of the celestial Sion? Be still, my heart, for thou hast never thought of anything comparable to the life which is spent in the city of the living God. This ethereal life comprises all kinds of delights, all riches, honours, and all delectations peculiar to every species of life, sense, and faculty. Burning with an ardent desire of this supreme life, St. Augustine exclaims:* "Oh, how great is that felicity in which there is the absence of every evil, and the presence of every good! in which we shall have leisure to praise God, who will be all things to all. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, O Lord; they shall praise Thee for ever! All the members and powers of the body, delivered from incorruption, shall exhaust themselves in praising God. There will be that true glory, in which neither he that praiseth is deceived, nor he who is extolled elevated and made proud by flattery. There is that true honour which is denied to no worthy person, and yet bestowed upon no one

* Lib. 22, de Civit. Dei, c. 30.

unworthy; which is neither coveted by the ambitious, nor lavished upon the undeserving; for in that region of celestial happiness, none dwell but the just and the virtuous. He who bestowed the grace of virtue, will Himself be the reward of it; for He has promised that He Himself will be the reward of the just. And what recompense can be conceived greater or more excellent? Hearken to the testimony of the Prophet Jeremiah: "I will be their God and they shall be my people."* I will be to them whatsoever they may lawfully desire. I will be their life, their health, their nourishment, their treasure, their glory, and honour, and peace, and every imaginable good. For this is the proper meaning of the words: "*God will be all things to all.*" He will be the end of all our desires. And the city of the blessed will possess one special happiness to be found no where else. Within its peaceful walls there will be no envy, no inferior will bear ill-will against his superior. For as amongst the members of the body, there reigns a perfect harmony, so that the eye does not say to the hand, I have no need of thee, nor the head to the feet, I want not

* xxxi. 33.

your assistance. No, God hath tempered the body together, giving to that which wanted the more abundant honour, that there might be no schism in the body, but the members might be mutually careful one for another.* In like manner, in the city of God there is universal peace and concord. There shall we keep the Sabbath of eternal rest. There we shall experience how sweet God is, with whom we shall be filled, since He will be all in all. Therefore, O God, Thou art my delicious truth, my true Eternity, my eternal felicity, my God, and my all!

The author of the work, "De Spiritu et Anima,"† thus apostrophizes the city of God: "In thee, there is no corruption, no defect, no old age, no anger; but perennial peace, and solemn glory, and everlasting joy, and perpetual solemnity! In thee, there is nothing but gladness and exultation, and ever blooming youth, and unfailing health! In thee, there is no yesterday, but the selfsame day now and for ever! In thee, there is security of life, health, and infinite peace! Upon thee, God pours out the abundance of His bene-

* I. Corinth. xii. 24, &c.

† Tom. 3, Operum. St. Aug. c. 60.

dictions! 'Glorious things are said of thee, thou city of the living God!' In thee, all who inwardly and truly rejoice have their habitation! In thee, there is no fear, no sadness, for every desire passes into joy, and what is desired is immediately at hand; and of everything that is wished for, there is an overflowing abundance. The citizens are inebriated with the plenty of Thy house, O Lord; and Thou invitest them to drink of the torrent of Thy pleasures. For with Thee is the fountain of life, and in Thy light we shall see light, when we shall see Thee as Thou art in Thyself, and ourselves in Thee, in a vision of cloudless transparency and unfading felicity."

Although this felicity of heaven be eternal, yet it may be obtained in a very short time, and by no great labour. "I have compassion on the multitude," said Jesus Christ, "for behold they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat."* Sweetest Jesus, is it a great matter to abide with Thee three days? Why not count the days of Eternity, during which Thou hast prepared for us everlasting happiness in heaven? Oh, how easy with the

* Mark viii. 2.

short labour of this life to merit eternal glory! God counts every action that we perform for His honour and glory, and receives with gracious smiles every piece of service which we do Him. He numbers the hairs of the head; and will He not number the drops of blood which are shed for His sake?

We may, therefore, lawfully exclaim with St. Jerome: Oh, what a great happiness is here before us! What great blessings do we not receive for trifles! eternal joys for momentary mortifications! What an infinite advantage to have the Lord Himself for our debtor! But you will, perhaps, object, that it is hard to suffer so much daily, and though other things might be endured, yet it is hard to die—death is something very appalling! O Christian brother, how can you make such a foolish and childish complaint as this? Can you plead ignorance? Do I not know that I ascend but to descend? that I bloom and flourish but to whither and decay? that I grow up in youth and attain to manhood, but to tread the down-hill of life and grow old? that I enjoy present existence but to die hereafter? and finally, that I die but to live in eternal

happiness? "You have hoped in the Lord for evermore, in the Lord God, mighty for ever."*

Again my mind reverts to St. Augustine, who makes these comments on the concluding portions of the sentences pronounced upon the reprobate and the just: "And these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the just into everlasting life."† Thus life eternal is promised, because men are fond of life on earth; therefore never-ending life is held out to them as the reward and termination of their labour. And because they are afraid to die, therefore, a life which will be followed by no death, is to be their recompense. What then, pray, do you love? Life? You shall possess it for evermore. What do you fear? Death? Do not tremble, for you shall not suffer death, provided you lead a good life. But they who are tormented in hell desire to die, but cannot. To live, therefore, a long time, yea, for ever, should not be the object of our fervent longings; but to live happily and eternally is the infinite boon conferred upon the just.‡

Consequently while you live in heaven

* Isa. xxvi. 4. † Math. xxv. 46.

‡ Serm. 64.

you cannot die. There, too, you will live happily. For you will endure no evil, nor stand in dread of anything disagreeable and unpleasant. Whatever you may desire, there you will possess, and be for ever satisfied with your possession. No power will be able to expel you from this your true inheritance, delivered to you solemnly by God Himself; and the knowledge of this security will render you supremely happy. It was in heaven that the Royal Prophet hoped to have his hunger allayed and his thirst quenched: "I shall be satisfied when Thy glory shall appear."* This is certainly a strange expression for a king, who had already a table laden with every kind of delicacy. Yet, as if perishing through hunger, he longed to satiate his appetite, not at his own, but at another's festive board. David, therefore, hungered for the bread of heaven, and longed to slake his thirst with the nectar—with the crystal waters which flow from the fountain of life. What indeed is the abundance and the luxury of the kings of the earth? The very greatest want the mere beggar's portion, if compared with the banquet of heaven. "Eat the honeycomb with my

* Ps. xvi. 15.

honey, and drink my wine with my milk," shall the King of the celestial Sion say to His honoured guests, "and be inebriated, my dearly beloved."* This royal and magnificent banquet will have no termination. It will be succeeded by nothing that is sorrowful, or calculated to inflict the sting of remorse. What it is to-day, it will be the same for ever! In contemplating these truths, St. Augustine breaks forth into these rapturous exclamations: "O life, truly designated life—life eternal—life infinitely happy during endless ages, in which there will be joy without sorrow, rest without labour, riches without adverse fortune, health without languor, abundance without want, life without death, perpetual enjoyment without interruption, blessedness without affliction, and all good things in perfect charity! There will be a full and complete knowledge of all things, and co-extensive with all things. The Majesty of God is beheld face to face, and the creature not dazzled by its infinite splendour, and the saints who gaze upon this pure and bright vision of eternal beauty and glory, are rapt in sinless ecstasy, and immersed in an ocean of bliss. The blessed always

* Cant. v. 1.

desire to see this effulgence of the Deity unveiled, and this desire is without any mixture of anxiety, and is always gratified without any weariness or satiety."*

Dear Christians, if you really wish to possess this surpassing glory, these immense riches, this eternal kingdom, listen to the following instructions of the same illustrious saint. "I have something," says God, "for sale, something important to dispose of; come and buy.—Lord, what is it Thou temptest us to purchase?—I have at my disposal true rest. Be prudent, and buy it.—But what is the price —Its price is labour.—And how much labour is that rest which knows no termination, worth?—If you speak the truth, and form a correct judgment, you will say that eternal rest is worth eternal labour.—Yes, this is the right answer. But, be not afraid; God is merciful. If you had to labour eternally, you would never arrive at eternal rest. Therefore, that you may enjoy the object of your purchase, you have not to toil on for ever. Not that the article is not worth the price of eternal labour, but because that which is bought will be put into the possession of the purchaser.

* Manul. c. 7, de gaud. par.

Eternal rest is, indeed, in value equal to never-ending labour; but it is necessary that it should be purchased by the toil and perspiration of a short life."*

"Let us, therefore," he continues, "contemplate a life free from every annoyance and molestation, and then consider that this life is to be *eternal*. Thus we shall more easily discover what it is not, than what it is. It is still on sale. You may purchase or not, as you please. You need not be seriously alarmed at the greatness of the price, for it is not valued at more than that of which you stand possessed. But do not reckon up what you have, but consider merely what you are; for the commodity is estimated to be worth just as much as yourselves, as you are worth. Give, then, yourselves, and you will be masters of it. Why, therefore, be uneasy? What is there to frighten you in this transaction? Have you to seek yourselves? to buy or obtain possession of yourselves? Give yourselves, such as you are, and the purchase will be secured.—But I am wicked, you may say, and God will not accept of me.—By giving yourself to Him you will become good. Make to Him a solemn pledge that you will

* In Psal. xciii.

devote yourself to His service, and this will establish you in virtue. And when once you are virtuous, you will be competent for the purchase, and will obtain not only that which I have already mentioned, health, security, and life without end, not only will you enjoy these blessings, but many others. You will neither be weary through lassitude, nor oppressed by sleep; you will neither hunger nor thirst; you will know neither helpless childhood nor doting old age, because there can be no birth where the number of years is perfect. And that number is perfect which admits neither increase nor diminution. Behold how many blessings I have described, and yet I have not said what the life of the blessed will be; 'because eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what great things God hath prepared for them that love Him.'* How, then, can I express that which man cannot conceive?"†

Inasmuch as we have hitherto been wandering through the works of St. Augustine, as through a pleasant garden even to the celestial Paradise, let us crown our labours by following the instructions of the same

* 1 Corinth. ii. 9. † De verbis Domini, Serm. 64.

eloquent and holy doctor. "If it behoveth us," he says, "to suffer daily all kinds of torments, yea, to endure the fires of hell, that we may behold Christ in His glory, and be united to the society of the saints, should we not willingly suffer every kind of tribulation, that we may be made partakers of all this happiness, and of all this glory? Let, then, the demons contrive their snares, and array in hostility against us their fiercest temptations; let fasting subdue the body, and hair shirts tame the flesh; let labours weary down poor tired nature, and long vigils dry up the humours of this perishable frame; let this person rail against, and that despise me; let the head ache, the breast burn with fever, and the stomach endure the pains of indigestion; let the countenance grow pale, the constitution become enfeebled, my life pass away in sorrow, and my years in sighs and groans; let rottenness enter my bones and consume my flesh,—yea, let me suffer this accumulation of miseries, provided I may rest in the day of tribulation, and ascend to the holy mountain of the Lord, and to the assembly of His saints! For what will be the glory of the just? Oh! how great will be the glory of the saints, when the

countenance of each one shall shine as the sun; when the Son of God shall number His bright army, each one in his distinct and peculiar rank and order, and shall distribute to each one, in the kingdom of His Father, the reward that has been promised to his works. Then will be given heavenly treasures for earthly labour, and eternal happiness for the momentary tribulations of this fleeting world."*

Think, therefore, "*on the days of old, and have in your minds the eternal years.*" Think on Eternity. O Christians and sinners, think on everlasting torments, on everlasting happiness, and I feel confident that you will never complain of adversity or affliction. Such an expression as *this is too heavy for me to bear*, will never escape your lips. You will, I am sure, count all things easy, and never rejoice more than when you are in the greatest affliction.

John Moschus informs us† that there was an old religious, named Olympius, in the monastery of Gerasimus, on the banks of the Jordan, who, by constantly reflecting upon Eternity, could endure with the greatest patience any cross or affliction,

* Manual c. 15.

† Cap. 141.

however severe it might be. A certain monk on his journey turned out of his path to visit Olympius, and when he beheld him, he exclaimed in astonishment: "How, O venerable Olympius, can you abide in this pent up cell, during the excessive heat of summer, all alive as it is with gnats and insects?" The patient old man simply replied: "These, my son, are very trifling matters. I suffer these evils that I may escape torments beyond endurance, the devouring and everlasting fire of hell. I bear patiently the annoyance of gnats, that I may not hereafter experience the sting of that worm which dieth not. It is very easy for him who dreads that fire which will never be quenched, to endure in silence the moderate heat of this confined cell. These things, are indeed, troublesome and painful to me, but then this pain and trouble will soon be over: they are rapidly hastening to an end; after that I shall neither see nor feel them any more." "Truly, Olympius," replied the other, "thou art a lover of wisdom and truth, so correct and so sensible is that which thou hast spoken." Would to heaven that there were many more Christians, than at present, in the same praiseworthy dispositions,

and who would reflect seriously upon these important subjects; then should we find very many more than we do, bearing their trials and sufferings patiently.

CHAPTER III.

THE EPILOGUE, OR CONCLUSION.

Zeuxis, the most eminent of all the ancient painters, laboured at his pictures day by day, touching and retouching them far more tediously, than became so distinguished an artist. When asked why he was so particular in trifles, why he repeatedly examined every part of the painting, why he drew so leisurely his outlines, and handled so carefully his brush? The answer he made was this: "*I am painting for Eternity.*" We also are painting for Eternity. For whatever we do so regards Eternity, that each one of us may say, with the strictest truth, "*I write, I read, I sing, I pray, I labour for Eternity.* Yea, whatever I do, whatever I say or think, has all reference to Eternity. If, therefore, this be the true nature of our

thoughts, words, and actions, it behoves us not to paint with a random and unsteady hand, but with care and deliberation, that we may send all our works into Eternity highly finished, and worthy of praise both from God and His angels, that they may receive an eternal reward, and not condemnation in the devouring flames of hell. We cannot repeat too often, should we repeat it a thousand times a day, that every thought once deliberately entertained by the mind, every word once spoken by the lips, every action once performed, is eternal, has been thought, and spoken, and performed for Eternity.

Hence these excellent instructions from St. Gregory: "In all our works, our intention should be weighed with the greatest care, that nothing temporal may influence those things which we perform, or desire to perform. No, let the mind be fixed upon the solid groundwork of Eternity. In all your works, therefore, be perfect. Pray, study, suffer, contend, and labour for Eternity. Live to God, live to heaven, live to Eternity!*

This admonition of St. Bernard is likewise deserving of our attention. "Our

* Lib. II. in Job. c. 3.

works do not pass away so quickly as they seem to do; for temporal things are the seeds, as it were, of eternal things. The simpleton is surprised to behold so large an increase from one small grain of corn, whether of good grain or bad, according to the quality of the seed cast into the furrow. He who reflects upon this, will deem no sin small; for he will direct his attention to the future harvest to be gathered up into the granary of Eternity, and not so much to diminutive seed now buried in the ground."

Oh, the dangerous and miserable insanity of the children of Adam! We were created to possess infinite and eternal treasures; and yet we throw ourselves, heart and mind, into the pursuits of the empty vanities and lying follies of this wicked and perishable world! God has inscribed our names in the pages of His divine records, as heirs of heaven and possessors of Eternity; why then do we so greedily covet the things of earth, and so continually entangle ourselves in the meshes of sin, to our eternal perdition? Let us be wise in time, that we may live for Eternity, and hasten to it with rapid steps and an indomitable energy. The way is short and nar-

row, but the end thereof expands and becomes broad and easy. O what foolish and wretched beings we are! We wish to obtain eternal life—we are unwilling to pursue the way of it! There we are desirous of dwelling, yet thither we refuse to go! Surely there is no one who does not wish to be happy. "There is no one," says St. Augustine, "whatever may be his position in the world, who does not covet a happy life. A happy life, therefore, is the common anxiety of all persons. But how are we to arrive at this end? By what path must we direct our steps? What is the length of the journey that will bring us to it? All this is matter of controversy. As long as we seek this happy life on earth, we shall never find it; not because that which we seek is evil, but because we seek it not in its proper place. One will exclaim that a soldier's life is happy, another will as positively deny it, and affirm that he who follows the plough leads a contented life. This again will be contradicted by one who fancies that a lawyer or a barrister's life is happy, because it is attended with so much popularity and applause. But this opinion will meet with an opponent in him who prefers the life of the judge,

because he has the power of hearing and deciding suits-at-law. This, however, will not be admitted by the travelling merchant, who considers that the most happy life which is spent in visiting foreign lands, learning the manners and customs of divers countries, and in heaping up the treasures of many climes. You see, dear Christians, in all this variety of professions and modes of life, not one which is pleasing to all, and yet every one expresses his satisfaction in a happy life."*

A truly blessed life, therefore, must not be expected on earth, but must be sought for elsewhere, and is not to be found save by a good death.

Even the wicked desire a good death, whilst they turn their backs upon a good life. To die well is the commencement of true felicity. To live well demands both labour and mortification. Now a good death cannot be obtained without a good life. And then Eternity depends upon the death we die; therefore, upon the good or bad life which we lead. It remains for you to choose your portion. Once condemned to everlasting torments, you will stand condemned for ever.

* Sermo de Martyr. qui Massa candida vocantur c. 2 et 3.

Not many years since, a nobleman of distinguished talent, but of unsound principles, being asked what he thought of the austere lives of the anchorites, in contrast with the dissipated lives of worldlings, shrewdly answered, "I would rather live with the latter, and die with the former." His reply would have been much more in accordance with Christian doctrine, if he had said, "I wish to live with those amongst whom I believe myself about to die." This was the desire of the wicked Prophet Balaam: "May my soul die the death of the just, and my last end be like to them."* Much more prudently and more advantageously for himself, would Balaam have said: "Let me live the life of the just, that I may die the death of the just." For he who lives the life of the just, will be sure to die the death of the just; and whoever leads the life of the wicked, cannot fail to die the death of the wicked, the second and eternal death.

A soldier being chided for a misdemeanour, by Lamachus, his Centurion, promised, in order to obtain pardon, that he would never commit it again. To whom Lamachus replied: You are aware that in

* Numb. xxiii. 10.

war no one can offend twice.* In death, alas, there is no offending once, for the doom is then irrevocably sealed. Once dead, you can die no more. Once you have died a bad death, you will be sentenced to everlasting reprobation. You cannot amend a bad death. You cannot revoke the sentence of condemnation, though you labour throughout Eternity!

Iphicrates was accustomed to say, that it was a shame for an emperor to exclaim with the fool, "*I did not think.*" But it is a far greater shame for a Christian to say, "*I did not think.*" For there is a vast difference between a chaste and a voluptuous life. *I did not think* that the whole of Eternity would depend upon the life I was leading! *I did not think* that I should die so soon! Alas, how coldly and carelessly do we go about the business of Eternity! even when we have no security of this our mortal existence! Since nothing is more certain than that we shall die, and yet nothing more uncertain than the hour of our death. When that dread hour arrives, we shall scarcely seem to have lived at all, but to have travelled post-haste from the cradle to the

* Plutach in Lac.

grave! We are but strangers, and not the owners of the land. We are but tenants at will, and not the freeholders of the dwelling and its appurtenances. The small cottage which we inhabit is let out, not given, to us. Willingly or not willingly, we must leave it at the appointed time, "For we have not here a lasting city; but we seek one that is to come."*

The Prophet Baruch asketh these questions: "Where are the princes of the nations, and they that rule over the beasts that are upon earth? that take their diversion with the birds of the air? that hoard up silver and gold, wherein men trust, and there is no end of their gathering?"† Do they still retain their kingdoms or their glory? The Prophet replies: "They are cut off, and are gone down to hell, and others are risen up in their place."‡ They have vanished because they were strangers, and not citizens. Their territories were rented, and when the term of their lease had expired, they were cast out into exterior darkness, in the bottomless pit of hell. But if it be enquired, Where are the princes of Hea-

* Heb. xiii. 14.

† ch. iii. 16. ‡ ch. ii. 1.

ven, who inhabit the empyreal palace of the celestial Sion? It cannot be answered that "they are cut off, and gone down to hell, and that others have risen up in their place." No, they still dwell in the city of the living God, and will never be cast forth and be deprived of their eternal possession.

"Let us crown ourselves with roses," say the wicked. They who are about to perish, crown themselves with roses, the beauty and perfume of which will have faded ere set of sun. Not so, however, with the Saints. They are crowned with gems and precious stones, the splendour and the beauty of which will never fade, on the head of Mary, Queen of Heaven, there is not a wreath of roses culled from the garden, nor a crown of mother-of-pearl sought for in the ocean's caves, but a diadem of twelve stars.* As the celestial orbs are incorruptible, so they who inhabit them will be stable and immortal. "The just shall live for evermore."† All sublunary things are perishable; but whatever is celestial is eternal. In this life a short labour fatigues us; in Heaven we are received into everlasting rest. But why do

* Apoc. xii. 1. † Wisd. v. 16.

we wish to be put in possession of the rest, before we have finished our labour? We are yet in the wilderness, wending our wearisome way through a barren and inhospitable region. Hence there is before us much toil, and perspiration, and wrestling with difficulties and dangers, ere our feet tread the happy soil of eternal peace and rest.

St. Gregory has very justly observed, "If we considered what kind, and what great things are promised to us in Heaven, all earthly things would immediately become contemptible. What tongue can express, or what mind conceive, the ravishing delights of the celestial Sion? the ecstatic joy of being united to the choirs of the angels—to assist these blessed spirits in glorifying our Creator—to stand in the presence of God, and see Him face to face, surrounded with His incomprehensible lustre, to be in no fear of death, but to be clothed in the garments of incorruptibility, and rejoice in the sublime prerogative of a glorious immortality? The very recital of these delights enkindles in the soul an ardent desire of being, where they are poured out in torrents upon the blessed for evermore. But we cannot attain to

these great rewards without great labour. He that striveth for the mastery, is not crowned unless he strive lawfully.* Let the greatness of the recompense cheer and animate the mind, and let not the difficulties of the combat terrify us. We must make daily progress, and persevere in our progression, not daunted by the asperity of the way, but emboldened by the eternal felicity of the happy land to which we are hastening."†

These thoughts the same holy doctor has forcibly developed in another portion of his writings.‡ "This," he says, "is the special sign or indication of the just, that they know how to pick their way through this present life in such manner, as to possess a well grounded hope that they have arrived at that sublime height from which they may look down with contempt upon all terrestrial things, and upon the giddy world which they trample beneath their feet, and thus, whilst daily ascending higher and higher, they become more and more inflamed with the love of Eternity. This is what God says to every soul that follows Him: 'I will lift thee up above

* 2 Tim. ii. 5.

† Hom. l. 37, in Evang. ‡ Lib. 31, moral, c. 34.

the mountains of the earth.' For there are certain lower regions of the earth, such as losses, reproaches, poverty, and abjection, which the lovers of the world, whilst they walk along the smooth and beaten path of pleasure, are always endeavouring to avoid as much as they possibly can. But 'the heights of the earth,' such as lucrative employments, the flattery of inferiors, great wealth, and honours, and distinguished places, all who have their desires fixed on Heaven will esteem low, whilst those whose hearts are tied by the cords of earthly affections, will extol as both high and great. But if the soul be once rivetted to things above, it will presently discern how vile and abject are the things which appear to others so important and desirable. For as in the ascent of a mountain, the things below us diminish in proportion as we climb higher; so in like manner he who fixes his attention upon the high and glorious things of Heaven, whilst he mounts upwards from the earth upon the wings of pious meditation, sees the glory of the world dwindling into nothingness, and beholds himself elevated far higher than those things, which, when his thoughts were low and

grovelling, he believed to be so much above himself."*

To these plain instructions of St. Gregory we will subjoin the testimony of St. Augustine, worthy to be written in letters of gold.* "That which sometime or other must necessarily be parted with, should be disposed of willingly for the sake of an eternal reward. Moses enjoyed a long and healthy life, but died at last.† Mathusalem lived much longer; but it is recorded also of him, that he died. This is the epitaph of all mortals, *And he died.* "We all die, and like waters that return no more, we fall down into the earth."‡ But the soul is immortal, and shall live for ever, either in eternal happiness or eternal torments. Here we throw the dice which are to decide our irrevocable doom in Eternity. O happy Eternity! O eternal happiness! How happens it that we so seldom, so very slightly, and as it were by mere accident, think of thee? How happens it that we do not labour more strenuously to obtain thee? Why are we not more solicitous to possess thee? O my God and my all, open Thou mine eyes, that I may

* Tract. 3, de 12, abus. grad. † Deut. xxxiv. 5.

‡ 2 Kings, xiv. 14.

know what Eternity is, how immense it is, and the vast difference between a happy and a miserable Eternity! Thou hast created us for Thyself,—Thou hast created us for Eternity, because Thou art eternal. Thou art anxious for us to be,—Thou hast commanded us to be,—Thou hast consecrated us to be, partakers of Thy Eternity. O grant from this moment that we may live so devoutly, that we may so labour, suffer, and contend for Eternity, as to be able to inculcate the same truth to all others, and reclaim as many souls as we can from perishing eternally. Hear, ye Christians,—hear, ye pagans,—hear, ye kings and princes,—yea, let all the world hear, "*There can be no good security when Eternity is in danger.*"

Oh! the length, the depth, the abyss,—the duration always enduring of Eternity! "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house O Lord; they shall praise Thee for ever and ever."* Moses, when about to die, commended by fervent prayer, his people Israel to the mercy of God; and then took this pathetic farewell of the tribe of Aser: "Let Aser be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let

* Psalm lxxxiii. 5.

him dip his foot in oil, his shoe shall be iron and brass. As the days of thy youth, so also shall thy old age be. There is no other God like the God of the highest; He that is mounted upon the heaven is thy helper. By His magnificence the clouds run hither and thither. His dwelling is above, and underneath are the everlasting arms."* Thus the Almighty stretches out the arms of His power through heaven into immensity; and under these arms are contained, guarded, and directed, all things in creation, the whole of time, and everything that claims existence. So that God from the beginning, yea, from the eternity of His predestination, was the tabernacle of the just, whom He embraced in His bosom, and protected under His eternal and stretched-out arms. Ascend, therefore, my soul from thy confinement in this cottage of clay, ascend to the tabernacle above. Stretch forth thyself and ascend to Him, who sitteth upon the highest heaven, to thy God who dwelleth in the lofty mountains, the immoveable hills of Eternity. There placed in safety, thou wilt despise the world, and behold how little those things are which now allure thee by strong affection, and

* Deut xxxiii. 24, &c.

distress thee with much fear. Yes, gaze and see how exceedingly insignificant all those things are which are contained in this globe, in this speck of the universe! See in comparison with God, in comparison with Eternity, how vain, how weak, how transitory, how vile, and how great an inanity, how great a nothingness, are all things created! Esteem, therefore, one supreme and immense good, and despise the rest as of no value. Rely on God, and enlarge thy heart for His reception. Tread beneath thy feet whatever is beneath the sun, no matter what blandishments may entice thee, or threats menace thee. Think on Eternity, and revolve in thy mind the excellent instructions of St. Jerome: "*No labour ought to appear hard, no time long, by which we may acquire a glorious Eternity.*"

A devil, one day, taking possession of a camel, appeared in this shape before the holy hermit Hilarion, and began to rage with so much fury, that the beast seemed about to devour the Saint. Helarion replied: "Do not think of terrifying me, thou wicked spirit, because thou art concealed in the large body of a camel. No, it maketh not the slightest difference to me, whether thou assumest the shape of a fox

or a camel." The ferocious beast immediately fell down before him; and its fury was changed into a ridiculous gentleness.* Such are all the blandishments, all the trials, and all the terrors of the world. What dost thou hope for? What dost thou fear? What dost thou love? He who ruleth the heavens is thy protector. He embraceth thee within His everlasting arms; and with these arms His power is able to bind in bonds that cannot be broken, both the enemies that would enslave thee by their enchantments, and terrify thee by their menaces. Yea, He is able to crush them, and powder them to dust, as so many flies, by the mere expression of His will. Do the vices of lust and intemperance assail thee with their enticements? Despise them as beneath thy notice. Think of the pleasures that are eternal. Do thy adversaries threaten thee? Does affliction lay a heavy hand upon thee? or contempt wound thy feelings? or sickness make thee low and feeble? or secret poverty dishearten thee? All these are even little; and the more sharply they assail, the sooner will their pains be exhausted, the more quickly will they cease their annoyance. Despise them,

* St. Hieron. in vita Hilar. c 18.

therefore, and lift up thine eyes to heaven, and think of Eternity. "Whatsoever shall befall the just man, shall not make him sad."* If the heavens fall in ruins upon his head, the just man will not tremble. Can, then, the servant of God be ever sad? Can any tribulation subdue him? No; "many are the afflictions of the just; but out of them all will the Lord deliver him."† They regard as evil that alone which separates from God and is Eternal; viz: sin and the wages of sin, *eternal death*. "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen," says the great Apostle of the Gentiles, "are temporal; but the things which are not seen, are eternal;"‡ and these are truly great, whether for good or evil.

But we, who so seldom contemplate the things which are not seen, what are we but silly children, instead of grave old men? We weep whilst letting fall the ice which we can hold no longer. We stand astonished at shadows, and fancy that great things will happen from dreams. We spend our time in those things which will not only

* Prov. xii. 21. † Psalm xxxiii. 20.

‡ 2 Corinth. iv. 18.

end shortly, but which are even now gliding rapidly away. "For the fashion of this world passeth away."* It is not said *shall* but "*doth* pass away." It is already in its passage or transit. And as all the good things to which we are attracted on earth are unstable; so, likewise, the evils which we suffer are but momentary and light. The things which are not seen have alone a permanent existence, they alone know no end, admit of no termination, are subject to no change, are stable, immoveable, eternal. I will again repeat, and would that I could repeat it a thousand times a day! I will again repeat the memorable admonition of St. Jerome: "*No labour ought to appear hard, and no time long, by which we may obtain eternal glory!*"

Symphorian, a young Christian martyr, after he had been cruelly beaten with clubs, was cast into prison. Two days afterwards when led out of the city of Autun to the place of execution, he was accosted by his mother standing on the walls of the city, not with dishevelled hair, and open bosom, but as a courageous Christian matron; "My son, remember eternal life, raise up your heart to heaven; and consider Him

* 1 Corinth. vii. 31.

who reigns there. For life is not taken from you, but exchanged for a better." The young man was so greatly comforted by this maternal exhortation, that he cheerfully submitted his head to the block, and won his crown of glory.*

O Christians, we, too, are led forth; we too, are going with a slower step, perhaps, than the martyr Symphorian, to death, our last punishment in this life. All the citizens of heaven are encouraging us with these animating exhortations, "Remember eternal life; look up to heaven; behold Him who reigns there." Do you, O Christian, whoever you may be, conduct yourself bravely, like Symphorian. Submit to labour, and severe warfare, and valiantly endure, if it be necessary, the sword for the love of Christ. Here dare every thing; here show your undaunted courage; and when you are tempted, when you are sorrowful, sad, or in trouble; when you are despised, laughed at, and treated with contumely; when you are plundered of your property and laden with more afflictions than the patient Job, imitate Symphorian and thousands of other Christian martyrs, and exclaim with a magnanimous soul, not

* Surius, 21 Aug., year 178.

once but many times: "All these things are but trifles, are of short duration. Farewell, all ye fleeting, perishable, posses sions, farewell! an eternal farewell! Thou alone, O Eternity, art welcome to me, art secure to me. Welcome, thrice welcome, a happy Eternity!"

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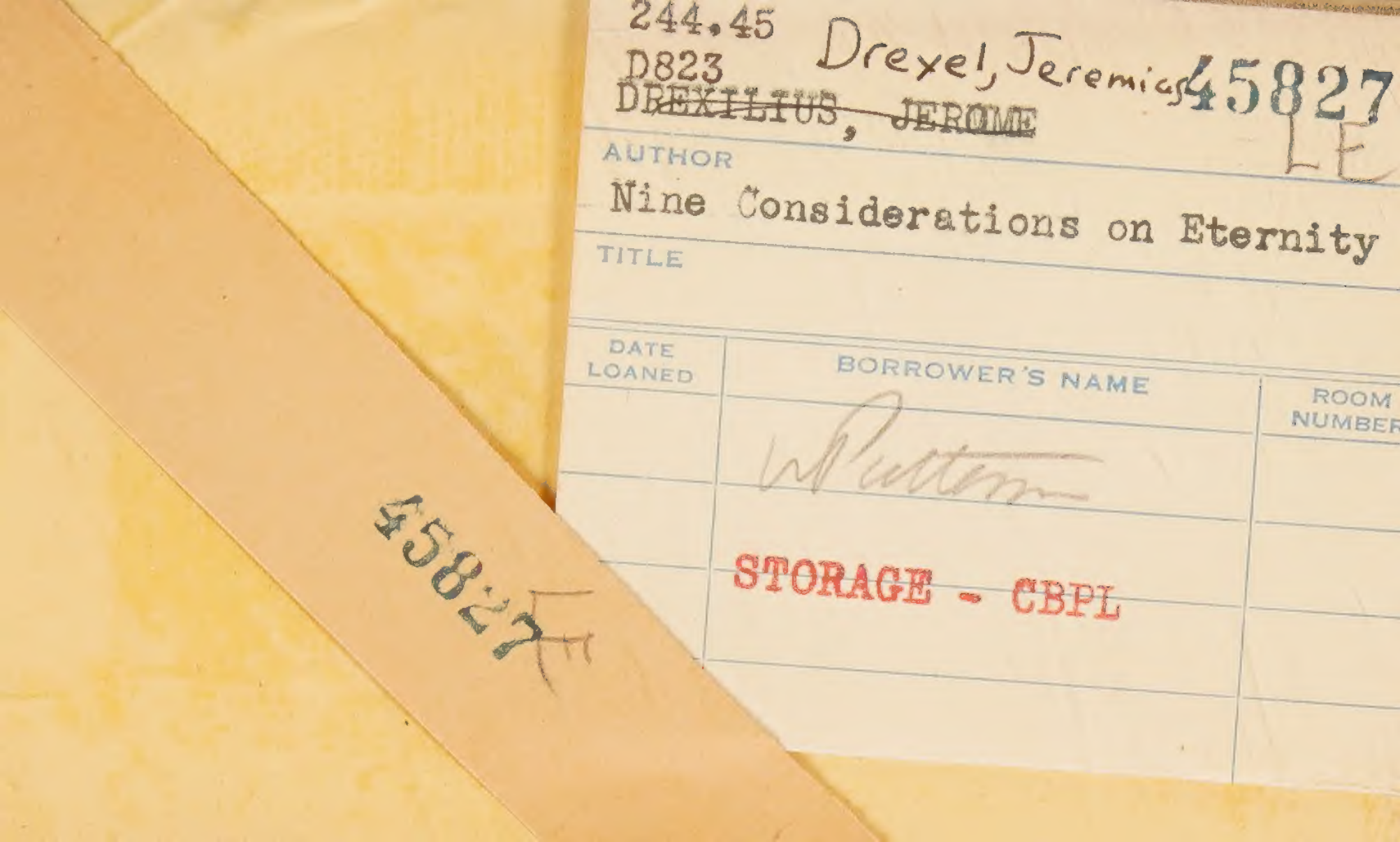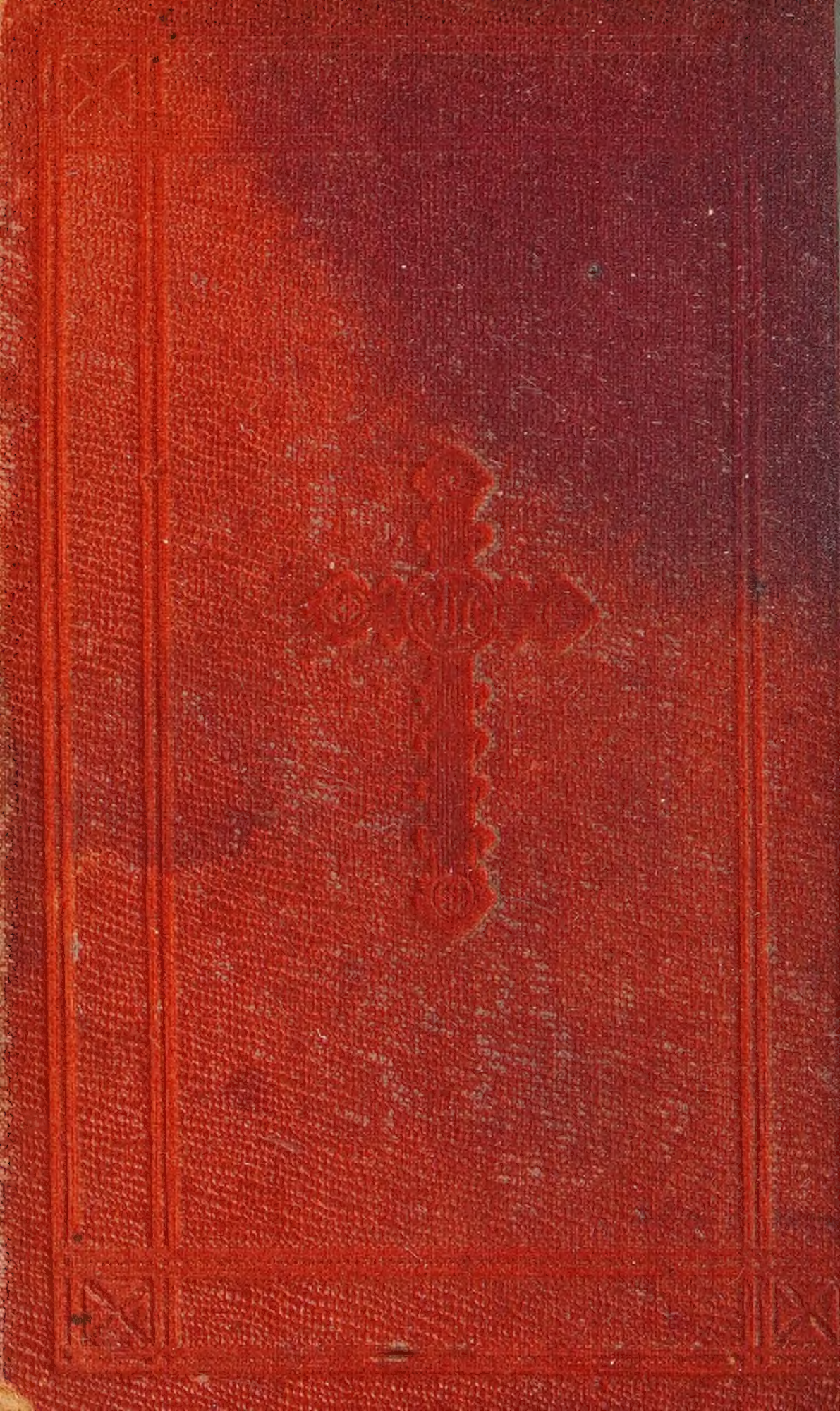
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